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POOR RELATIONS  
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# MY POOR RELATIONS

STORIES OF DUTCH  
PEASANT LIFE

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS *friend.*

AUTHOR OF

"DOROTHEA," "GOD'S FOOL," "JOOST AVELINGH," ETC.

*Joost Marius Willem van der Sandt, Leiden*



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*Published March, 1905*

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## Jan Hunkum's Money

### I

**T**HE whole hamlet effervesced with delicious perturbation. Every one was telling every one else that Jan Hunkum lay murdered in his bed.

The Hemel is one of the dirtiest spots in a country where no spot is very dirty. The appearance of the place is against it : some few dozen disorderly hovels lie pitched across a field, their builders having allowed them to fall as they chose. Some, abusing this permission, lurch heavily, looking as if, like many of the people inside them, they had frequently taken a drop too much. Others bend backwards, propped up with the pride that cometh before a fall, and the general crookedness, and the old age that accentuates it, give the tumble-down dwellings a disreputable leer such as many of the indwellers have developed for themselves. Our conceptions of heaven—which is “De Hemel”—must inevitably remain inadequate at the best : perhaps the angels up yonder, in cloudland, cannot properly distinguish the gulf which, in our appreciation, sinks a pool of poverty and wickedness like this little Dutch hamlet beneath a favoured nook of our deteriorated Paradise such as, say, Monte Carlo. Still, the name is undoubtedly euphemistic : and yet, again, how easily

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the place might have been, or grown, worse ! True, its houses, and heads, are untidily thatched ; the nakedness of the land is as patent as that of many a yokel pretending to till it : never has anything connected with the village been properly drained or trained : never has anything been quite sufficiently scrubbed, excepting the newest born baby—yet, as a rule, the community washes itself grey, and in all its rag-and-bone debasement it tries to draw the line at vermin. Dutch squalor does.

In Jan Hunkum's day the old man's cottage was the only hale and hearty building of the lot. Forty years of his stupid life Jan Hunkum spent in it—more than half the whole—and during that long period of possession, for he owned it, he had it once repainted and twice repaired. Therefore it *stood*, distinctly noticeable, amongst the straggling paths and rough potato-plots, with a yellow zone of weeded gravel round it, a sort of self-important centre towards which its ramshackle surroundings seemed to have been huddling before they came to pieces on the moor.

Across the open space in front of this central cottage a rabble of excited men, women, and children now swarmed, eagerly expectant of horrors to come. It was early morning, misty and chilly, a raw November day-break. The damp little dwelling stared back at the whispering groups, its two windows tightly shuttered, the door in the middle ostentatiously opaque.

Somebody—no one knew who—running past somebody else, had cried out that Jan Hunkum lay murdered. Somebody—opinion here varied—had raced off to Horstwyk, the village, for its single policeman. Suddenly every one was full of the news. No two stories coincided as to persons or particulars. Nobody really



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knew anything. That, too, was delightful. For necessity became the swift mother of invention.

But all were fully agreed that it served Jan Hunkum right. Not because he was a bad man—few of them cared to discriminate badness—but because he was rich and a miser, and they, the whole tribe of them, were his putative heirs. 'Tis ill waiting for the death of a cousin close on eighty, when that cousin daily duns you for exorbitant rent.

Jan Hunkum had long been known as the oldest inhabitant. There might easily have been many far older—for the human plant, as all men can see, excepting sanitarians and scientists, grows toughest on a dunghill—but the population tired of its grandparents as soon as the old people got "it" on the chest, and would bundle them off to the Horstwyk poorhouse with a shamelessness which disgusted the very beggars of the more respectable place. In defence of the Hemelers it must be stated that admission into the poorhouse was considered a safeguard against death, on the principle that it takes two killings to kill a pauper, just as a charity child is known to have nine lives. "And what's more," said Joop Sloop, the Hemelers' self-appointed wiseacre, "there never yet was anybody born so fond of his relatives, that he could 'a stood them coughing all night unless he'd had a cough of his own!" After seventy all died of "it" on the chest. Nobody had ever been murdered. That was distinctly original.

It was just like Jan Hunkum, who had always been unique. Who but he had ever kept money in his purse or kept a purse to keep the money in? Jan Hunkum had strong boxes, iron safes, coffers full of gold. Nobody had ever beheld them: everybody knew they were there.

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Nobody minded their existence—have there not always been rich folk and poor folk?—but everybody abused him for the cruel old miser he certainly was, these improvident rascallions all around him being far too necessitous to understand the madness of money unspent.

And yet he was one of themselves, cousin, variously removed, to the whole lazy crew of them. Herein also his case was peculiar. For while many of them were affiliated, and many at feud, he was everybody's relation and detested by all.

A voice rose above the loud murmurs by the cottage. "I won't go for to say it serves him right!" said the voice. "Seeing as 'tis Goramighty gives us all our dues. But I will say as 'twas bound to happen. Lor, it'll happen again!"

This statement was received in silence.

"With an old man living by himself," continued the voice, "in a house that's packed with gold from floor to ceiling!"

Though all recognized this well-known fact, yet a thrill ran through the assembly to see it thus nakedly exposed.

"And tramps going by all day," said another voice. This suggestion received general approval. Everybody eagerly said—"Tramps."

"Is the gold *there*?" queried a small boy with a wizened face. He pointed to the cottage.

A murmur arose like the swift soughing of the wind. Momentous question! Was the gold still there? Each hungry creature gazed into his neighbour's apprehensive eyes. Supposing that, in the very moment of righteous acquisition, the treasure of the Hemel had melted away

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from the extended claw! A groan broke loose: then, of a sudden, all were talking together, out loud.

They must get into the silent house to make sure! They could go round by the back—no, that would be impossible!—they must all break open the door. Somebody—no, all together—by the little scullery window!—why together?—for a moment, in the fierce flare of universally disclaimed distrust, there arose a menace of battle—all together, mind! Share and share alike—who says the police must enter first? Oh, only that fool, Jaap Avis!

"'Tis the law," said Jaap Avis quietly, audible amid the noise.

"The law? And a man's relations? Shall a dead corpse lie weltering in gore and its own relations not try to restore it?"

A woman's screech had soared above the Babel with "own relations!" Immediately there followed a lull. A gaunt creature with violent eyes had pushed herself to the front. "Yes, own relations," she repeated fiercely. "'Tis a dead man's nearest relations must look after things. *That's* the law! And I'm sure, if my Uncle Hunkum——"

Fierce as she was, she shrank back before their outburst of abuse. "Uncle, indeed! Her uncle! The impudence! Her daughter's uncle, perhaps? Ha! Ha! He was every one's uncle and nobody's uncle! They were all his equal relations, his cousins, his heirs!"

"No!" cried Joop Sloop, the publican and barber. There was conscious authority in his accents. "Shares'll depend on degrees of relationship. Of cousinship," he added, with a scornful glance at the silently defiant "niece."



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For a moment again they stood hushed, all grown suddenly genealogical. And amidst the knitted brows and dumbly computing lips a meek little voice piped forth—

“ But supposing he's left a Scripture, Joop ? ”

“ A testament, you mean, Jaap Avis. How ignorant you people are ! He hasn't left, as I happen to be aware, any sort of last will or testament.”

“ How aware ? ” cried a dozen voices. “ What's a last will or testament, Joop ? ”

The barber rubbed his unshaven cheek.

“ Never you mind how I know what I know,” he said.

“ I don't care,” persisted Jaap Avis, the shoemaker, sullenly. “ When a man makes a writing at a notary's, his relatives don't get a cent. I know they don't. For why ? I had a plaguy sister did it.”

They all jeered at this boast. “ A sister as was a lady, I suppose ? ” said one.

“ No a lady's maid,” retorted the little man, too weak to swear at any but the absent or the dead. He turned on his heel.

“ And what's more,” continued Joop Sloop, with unction, “ I advise you all to wait very patiently till Government pays each man his share. Government's never in a hurry. 'Cause why ? 'Cause Government never dies. And now go home, you people, and don't anybody talk of breaking in doors.”

“ But the money ! ” clamoured half a dozen voices. “ The money ! Is it there ? Is it gone ? ”

“ *He's* there, at any rate,” said a young girl, who, till then, had stood silent beside the “ niece.” All stared at her. A new idea again.

“ *He's* there,” the girl repeated hurriedly. “ One'd

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think his ghost was peering at us through that hole in the left-hand shutter. I've seen his eye a-twinkling there a hundred times when I came to bring the bread. *That's* his bedroom."

A couple of women shrieked. The girl stepped forward to the barred and watchful house. "La, I saw something shine!" she cried, and leaped away.

But, if this was a *ruse* to protect the cottage, it failed. Protestant Dutchmen are the least superstitious of mankind. With a general outcry, "The thief! The thief!" the whole band, intent upon saving "their" property, rushed madly at the door.

Before any one could reach it, they saw it fall open. The murdered man stood on the threshold. Screaming now, in good earnest, the whole dingy flight fluttered back.

He was wrapped in a faded dressing-gown. His livid face, with the bushy eyebrows and immense protruding underlip, was swathed in linen bandages. There were horrid stains upon the bandages. His wicked eyes shot fire.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he said: there was no laugh in the sound. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" For a moment he seemed incapable of any other utterance. "My poor relations!" he said at length. "My poor, poor—relations! Are you all there, my relations? Has nobody forgotten to come?"

They stood in a furious half-circle. But nobody minded his sarcasm, except the girl, who shrank behind her mother.

"Walk in, ladies and gentlemen," continued Jan, standing aside with a swift profusion of bows. The ends of linen on his bald head went bobbing to and fro.

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"Walk in, pray, and inspect the property! A very desirable property!" Then, as nobody moved, he burst out—

"Come here—do you mind me?—you white-livered cowards! What are you afraid of, you skulking thieves? Is it a dead man you fear, you robbers? Afraid he's not dead enough—ha!" And now he really laughed—a discordant twang. "Come in and see what there's left of Jan Hunkum's money! Each of you may keep what he finds and be welcome to waste it!—ha!" By sheer force of passion he dragged them towards him: slowly the whole troop crept forward into the narrow passage and, pushed from behind, all over the two little rooms.

The cottage presented a scene of the wildest disorder. Everything bore evidence, in the bedroom, of a struggle, in the parlour, of a search. The scant furniture had been upset and flung asunder and scattered across the floor. Nothing seemed seriously damaged or broken, but the cupboard doors swung everywhere unlocked, the drawers, with their meagre contents, lay yawning right and left. The clumsy visitors hung open-mouthed. Not one of them had ever been, as yet, inside Jan Hunkum's jealously bolted door.

"Now search while you can!" cried the miser, rubbing his discoloured hands. "If there's a penny left, find it, keep it, and spend it! But only for money, mind! Is there any money left, you murderers? Which of you has got it, you cut-throats? Or have you already divided it between you—share and share alike!—and nobody blabs?"

The gaunt woman turned indignantly. "Now the Lord Almighty is witness, Jan Hunkum," she said, "that

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none of us has ever seen a penny of yours. *I haven't. And well I might.*"

"Is that you?" replied the old man coolly. "Trust you to talk loudest, Mary Brock. And why, pray, should *I* pay, more than others, for Mary's daily gin?"

"'Cause she's your niece, don't you know—cousin!" broke in a lean woman with a hump.

"My niece? That's a lie, and she knows it. Her grandfather was brother to my mother. Oh, I know about your precious relationships—none better—as some day you'll all find out!"

At this moment Jaap Avis, whose mild eyes had been ceaselessly travelling round the apartment, darted forward and picked something up. "One florin for me," he said gently. "You said we might keep all we found."

"What!" shrieked the old man. "Have they left me a florin? G——, let me look at it, Jaap Avis! A florin! A whole silver florin! Well, an honest man's word is as good as an oath, they say"—his voice died to a moan—"you must keep it." He sank into an old wicker armchair and covered his face with his hands.

The search now began in earnest; the whole rabble turned and twisted in the narrow space, bumping one against the other as they painfully bent, while the children gleefully scrambled in and out, or rubbed their grumbling elders' unaccustomed backs. The owner of the cottage had adjusted his bandage and sat watching, with folded arms, no expression on his wicked old face.

"That's right!" he said. "Mind you look everywhere! Think of Jaap Avis' florin! Only yesterday, as all of you know, my house was heaped full of gold and silver. And now there's nothing left but one beggarly florin, and Jaap Avis has gotten that. Oh Law!"

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He began to moan and beat his breast. "Jaap Avis!" he cried with sudden fury, "Jaap Avis has gotten that!"

Evidently, no such luck was in store for the others. One by one, the searchers slackened; the children had long ago desisted: suddenly all stopped, dead beat. The oldest and weariest, lingering last, sank in a heap on the floor. None of the Hemelers was accustomed to labour in any form.

"Not a penny left," said the old man slowly, and stared at the knocked-up do-nothings in front of him. "Robbed of everything in a single night. Are you sure that you've looked everywhere? Jaap Avis found a florin. My last florin. Look again. Look everywhere. Look again."

Some of them turned despairing eyes to various corners, but the heart had gone out of the Hemelers. Jan Hunkum's glance fell upon the girl, as she lolled, indifferent, against the outer door. "Go home, Liza Brock," he said almost gently for him. And she obeyed him, slinking away.

"And now, hear me, you all!" he began. "You see that I've been robbed of every penny. Go and find the man that did it: go and bring my money back. It's in a brown leather chest—no very big chest—a brown leather chest with bright brass fittings. All my money's in that chest. The man that brings my money back—hearken to me: I swear it by the Heaven that made us—made *me*, at any rate, you brutes—the man that brings me my money back shall have every penny of it, legally, lawfully, by will and testament, if ever I come to die. But first he must kill the man that took it. And hearken again, you brutes"—he spoke very carefully, without

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any excuse for the violence of his language—"you've seen the whole place now, as you've thirsted to do for years and years—oh, I know you!—you've seen the coffers and cupboards, and the diamonds all piled to the ceiling"—he cast a swift leer round the bare but clean little bedroom—"and now if one of you ever darkens my threshold again on any pretence—mind you, on *any* pretence—I swear it: he shall never—no, not if he did it to save my life—he shall never inherit a penny of mine. I shall write that down in a will to-night, lest I die ere I've done it. Get out!" He pointed to the door and continued silently pointing till the last ragged figure had slouched away into the bluish autumn mist.

Then he slowly raised himself and began to unwind the blood-stained bandages. His bald head with its fluffy fringe, his skinny neck and sharp cheek-bones and chin, the whole cunning, covetous countenance gradually stood out clear against the whitewashed wall. He drew forward to the little tenpenny shaving-glass that hung in the window. There was no sign of a wound anywhere. He chuckled softly. "I should like to hear Jaap Avis," he muttered aloud, "when he finds that his florin's a bad one. I've had it about me more than twenty years: never did I think to get so advantageously rid of it. The more fool I to take counterfeit coin!"

## II

THAT evening the customary Saturday conversazione at Joop Sloop's was quite unprecedentedly animated. Clouds of surmise and suggestion ascended over the pipes and "Hollands." There was much discussion, but little argument.

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Immemorial tradition decrees that the least indolent of the Hemelers shall shave all the others on Saturday nights at a farthing per chin. Also that he shall be permitted to eke out his little profits by keeping them waiting as long as he likes (they're not in a hurry) whilst purveying, for their delectation, the smallest of gossip and the filthiest of unlicensed spirits. Joop Sloop had now been a barber for a quarter of a century, by right of his possessing the biggest front room. Also he possessed a strapping red and black daughter, Julia, who could take the gin-money, and a coarse jest, with a laugh, and could parry the jest. He was absent to-night. Meanwhile Julia was doing the honours.

"Well?" said Jaap Avis with measured exultation. "Now whom do you believe, pray, neighbours, Joop Sloop or me? Can a man leave his money where he likes or can't he?" Jaap Avis felt that sometimes 'tis pleasanter to be proved mistaken. "Jan Hunkum makes his testament and none of us gets our own. Now that he's lost his money, the old rogue gives it away."

"You needn't complain, Jaap Avis," replied one of the men with a grunt. "You've got your florin, you have. None of us can say as much." The others looked stolid approval: very rarely does the real peasant commit himself to the proverbial "nod" of assent.

Jaap Avis smiled. "Yes, I've got my florin," he said. But then his complacent cheeks sank in. "And what's a beggarly florin?" he said.

"'Tis twenty stivers, a hundred cents. Two whole years' shaving," came the quick reply. "'Tis a bird in the hand, and is a bit of good luck, 'tis a—shame! You'll have to stand treat, Jaap Avis."

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The speaker, a blustering bully, struck the table with his fist.

"All right : hold your row," muttered the shoemaker fretfully. "Julia, get Fistycuffs a pennyworth o' gin ! " The girl stretched across her brown arm for the bottle, throwing little Jaap Avis, as she did so, a look of unconscious contempt. "And fill it up full !" grinned the giant. "Don't try to bully *me*," retorted Julia, deliberately spilling a great splash from the glass.

At this juncture her father entered. In the sudden silence every face said—"Well ? " All being anxious to put the same question, nobody spoke. Solemnly the slow barber seated himself.

"A—a—ah," he said. Then he wiped his forehead with a red pocket-handkerchief. "Mum's the word," he said.

"Did anybody ask ye anything ? " questioned the bully. Joop Sloop stared straight in front of him. "The testament," he continued softly, "is sealed. Mum's the word."

Somebody more nervous than the rest spat on the floor.

"And the fate of the Hemel," whispered Joop Sloop, "is sealed too."

A flash of covetousness died away across twenty cautiously closing eyes. The barber leant back in his chair, secure of his effect. "But hush !" he said, and put one finger to his lips. "So much I owe to Cousin Jan ! "

The bully stumbled to his feet and came heavily forward. "You'll finish now that you've begun, Joop Sloop !" he cried, "or I'll mash your potato nose into a pancake, Joop Sloop !" He thrust up a great dumpy fist : the girl struck it down. "Two goes of gin," she



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said deliberately, " to whoever turns the drunken rascal out ! "

" I'll turn myself out, if you'll gi' me the drink," replied the fellow coolly. " Boys, you all heard her ! She owes me twopennyworth of the best Schiedam ! " He grinned. " Best or worst, 'tis all equally bad," he said—" Pah ! " This termination seemed to exasperate Julia. She ran round the counter. " Pack o' cowards ! " she screamed. " Smoke your pipes and see me lick the biggest coward amongst ye ! " A lubberly, yellow-haired young fellow, who had been dozing on a settle, sprang up as she passed him, and, pushing her down on it with one hand, caught the bully with the other by the scruff of the neck. " Out you go ! " he said quietly. They could all hear Fistycuffs swearing, as he picked himself up on the outer side of the bolted door.

Then Julia, crossing the room in silence, reached down from the mantelshelf a brilliantly painted tumbler, " Love's Gift " in a wreath of forget-me-nots and roses, an heirloom, dusty with half-forgotten honour and long-buried affection. The others looked on.

Careless of their conclusions, she almost filled the undusted goblet. " Strong drinks to the strong ! " she said under her breath.

" No more liquor for me," replied her champion, plunging both red hands into rusty pockets. The girl's eyes clouded with angry tears.

" Please yourself," she answered harshly and made as if she would have dashed her offering to the ground. But she only poured back the drink, with steady hand, into the great square jar beside her.

" Won't you let me get you something, Barend ? "

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she questioned softly, and began polishing the painted flowers with a slip of her dirty apron.

"Get me first turn at the shaving," answered the young fellow; "I'm simply sick o' waiting here." He flung round on his heel, and again the angry blushes swept over Julia's passionate face. "Me first, Joop!" cried Barend, "Julia says I'm to have first turn! I'm in a hurry, don't you see? Fistycuffs is waiting for me outside." All joined in his laugh, but mildly, not caring to remove their pipes.

The barber bent over his battered kettle and further very primitive apparatus. "To hear you go on, Barend Everts," said Sloop, "one'd think you were Rothschild or old Jan Hunkum!"

"Me!" Suddenly the young chap disclosed a pair of sleepy blue eyes.

"Yes, you," retorted the barber irritably. "I suppose you don't care to know—not you, nor nobody here present—about money being left 'em in a will—oh, no!" He started round with uplifted strap. The various countenances, scattered in the dusk of the paraffin-lamp, twitched.

"But surely Jan Hunkum's money is gone," interposed Jaap Avis nervously, protruding his big head from a cloud of smoke.

"So it is—stolen," replied Joop. "And what are the police for—pray—but to get it back again?"

A shout of derision rang out around the words. All their pent-up, disappointed cupidity poured down scorn on the police. A dozen recent undiscovered murders filled the air with a tumult of dispute. "Hush, hush!" remonstrated the barber, vainly holding up his hands. "Hush! Remember, the police——"

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"Never see what isn't shown 'em," said a grim voice from a corner, "and all the better for every one of us." There was an awkward lull, a general feeling of vexation.

"I wouldn't touch a penny of Hunkum's money—no, not if the police was to come and bring it me." Barend Everts settled himself in the shaving-chair. "You needn't sneer, for I wouldn't, Joop Sloop. I wouldn't touch money that the dirty Government gives you, with their testaments and notaries and God knows what! Nor I wouldn't let *any* man give me money. I'm no beggar, I! The little I want I can get for myself."

"Earn for yourself?" suggested the barber sweetly, flourishing his razor.

The other's ruddy face grew dark. "Yes, earn for myself, thank God."

"God?" repeated the barber.

"Father, hold your tongue!" broke in Julia's loudest tones. "Barend's never been hauled up for anything worse than poaching, and that's more than the best of your friends can say for you!"

Joop Sloop ran across to his daughter. "You fool!" he hissed. "But it isn't *me* you're hurting! Idiot!—to tell the whole room that you've lost your black heart to a lout who won't look at you!"

"What do I care if he won't look at me?" replied the girl in a furious whisper—"as long as I can look at him!"

"Why, a poacher," suggested Jaap Avis smoothly, "a poacher's as much of a gent as any other sportsman. Money's the only difference between them, and money never made a gent, as the baron was wont to say."

"Well, the soap's cold," remarked Barend indifferently, still lying back, "you must make some fresh

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lather, Joop. And all for one cent. One'd think—but that all know better—it was you didn't care for tin. Well, whom has old Jan left his money to—the money he says he's no longer got ? ”

“ Will you stand me a dram if I tell ? ” said the barber.

Jaap Avis threw down his florin. “ I'll pay,” he said. “ So much,” he added, mimicking the barber, “ I owe our Cousin Jan.”

Joop Sloop looked round the company. “ Jan Hunkum,” he began, amid a sudden deepening silence as in church—“ Jan Hunkum has been and gone and done exactly what he threatened to. He's made a will. *I was witness.*” Joop Sloop drew himself up and then resumed his shaving. “ He's left his money between his heirs. Each'll get his legal share ‘ as in their dotation,’<sup>1</sup> to use the proper legal phrase. So, when he dies—and die he must—all we shall have to do'll be to call on the notary for our legacies. But there's one condition—he said there would be”—Joop Sloop looked round triumphantly—“ a sinecure now. Whoever can be proved to have entered his house, on any pretext whatever, after the date of the making of the will, loses all chance of touching a penny and remains disqualified for ever. So now you know. Amen.” He recited these last sentences like a lesson and once more fell to rasping Barend Everts' chin.

“ And no legacies specified ? ” Jaap Avis questioned anxiously. “ No distinctions made ? ” No favour shown ? ”

Joop Sloop smiled with leisurely enjoyment of the big

<sup>1</sup> “ *Ab intestato.* ”

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lie he was going to tell. "Not a penny," he answered loudly. "Everything fair and square. Share and share alike, according to your Bible birthright."

Barend Everts broke away from under the knife. "'Tis a rascally shame," he cried, starting up. "A mean, beastly shame! Just the kind of low thing for one old scoundrel to do and another old scoundrel to boast about."

"Softly, softly," said the barber. "For shame," expostulated Avis. "Your father was a second cousin, same as me."

"'Tis a shame because it is a shame," retorted Barend Everts. "Like everything, that's a shame. And if I was Government, such things wouldn't be allowed. Though, of course, if I was Government, I'd be as bad as Government is."

"He means Liza Brock," put in Julia from behind the bar. "He wants Liza Brock to have old Jan's money. And he wants to marry Liza Brock. Pity her name ain't Liza Hunkum, Barend? Sold, my boy! You'll have to marry her just as she is." She jingled the money in her bag. 'Twas only coppers.

The great simpleton stared right and left in angry amazement. Then he found natural relief in a tremendous oath, and fled, upsetting a chair, with the echo in his ears of inaudible laughter.

Outside in the darkness hung the grey November mist. The rustle of its unrelenting drip was everywhere. On the bare hedgerows, down the scraggy trees, along the tattered eaves. In the darkness the shiny globules formed and fell incessantly, the puddles gleamed across the slippery roadway: amid the windless silence all

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things seemed to listen for the next pat, and the next. The air was raw and miserable. Barend stumbled on, for that was his way of walking. He never noticed damp.

He lighted a farthing cigar, the weight of his thoughts oppressing him. Active indignation confused his placidly discontented brain. He was one who took life easily, although, or more probably because, they feel, with a strong man's helplessness, that most things on earth are evil, especially the Powers that, irrevocably, Be. And he hated oppression, even of others.

He went on across the hazy fields, where a dim light twinkled here and there. Presently he stood still, in the dripping desolation, near a tumble-down pig-stye, and whistled. He whistled again, balancing himself against the fence of roughly-hewn firs, the rank steam rose around him. "Hang the girl," he said aloud. "I thought I was late enough!"

"So you were," cried a voice behind the pig-stye. "And I'd leave you to whistle a few minutes longer, Barend, if this weren't the first and last time you'll whistle for me." The girl came round the corner and confronted him. "Well, now," she said sullenly, "make haste. Pray, what may you want with me?"

"I want to tell you that I'm sweet on you," he answered sullenly too.

"You've told me that before," she retorted angrily. As angrily as a woman can. Not so very angrily.

"Well, it's as true now as then. Truer."

"And what did I answer you at the time?"

"You know," he said, kicking at the rotten fence.

"Well, that's as true now as then. Truer."

"Truer?" He caught at the word.

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"Truer. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes. Tell me."

"I won't. Not to-night, at any rate. I can't. Go away."

One of the pigs in the sty moved heavily. "And what should I marry you for?" the girl burst out, goaded by his sorrowful silence. "What have you to offer me, pray?"

There followed a moment of derisive exultation on her part, then Barend gasped forth painfully, with the air of a man who has put his own hand to his throat—"Liza, if you *really* wanted that, I—could make you a rich woman, Liza!"

She stared at him curiously, peering forward, pursing up her lips. "Rich?" she echoed. "Real rich, Barend? Could you make it worth my while? With a blue silk dress and a servant-girl? Are you sure and certain, Barend, you could let me have a girl?"

"Sure," he answered. "And two silk dresses. Oh, Liza, were you really wanting that?"

"I should like to be rich," she said frankly.

Then she laughed shrilly in his face, and the next moment, quite seriously—

"So it was you took old Jan's money?" she said.

"No, I didn't. Though, perhaps, some day I shall."

The night-mist dropped all round them. And although he hardly knew it, his very heart was dark.

"From whom?" she asked breathlessly.

"Why—from old Hunkum." She gave a gasp of relief. "Take it from old Hunkum to give to you. For it isn't stolen yet."

"What do you mean? What do you know?" Her voice still trembled. "My God! who could rob that poor old man?"

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"It isn't stolen, I tell you. Every one says I'm a fool—I suppose I am. But I've seen through Jan Hunkum's trick at any rate. P'raps I see things by myself at times that only a fool can see. He's thought out a plan to secure himself against any of us trying to rob him. And that's where this will comes in—oh, your mother'll tell you about the will. He's got his money, never fear. 'Tis a cunning little plot that one fool has understood."

"I don't believe a word of it," the girl retorted scornfully. "You are a fool; you know that everybody says so. And the florin?—how about Jaap Avis' florin? Could you ever think Jan Hunkum would throw a florin away?"

"I don't understand about the florin," replied the lover humbly.

"There, you see!" she cried in triumph. "I know Jan Hunkum better'n you! Don't I take him his bread every morning, regular? And he always says 'Good-morning, Liza,' regular, which is more than he does to any one else."

"Doesn't he ever say anything more?" asked Barend.

"Never anything more. He comes outside and he says—'Good-morning, Liza,' and he takes his loaf and pays his pence and shuts his door, and I go on to my other customers. And if there's a change in the price of bread he always knows."

"And he's never said a kind word to you all these years?"

"Why should he say a kind word to me?"

He shrank back before the fierce defiance of her tone. "Do people in this hell of a place say kind words to one another? Love-making words, perhaps, or wheedling words to cheat a poor girl or to diddle your neighbour;



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but kind words!—kind!—I wonder what they sound like! Psha!” She beat the ground with her foot, turning away.

“I’m sorry mine don’t sound kind,” he answered more humbly than ever; “I mean ’em to.”

“Psha!” she said again.

“But it does seem to me that Jan Hunkum ought to be special good to you. Special good. And he ought to leave his money to you, instead of wasting it on a lot of lazy cousins. I said as much this evening, speaking for myself at Joop Sloop’s——”

“You said as much this evening at Joop Sloop’s?” She came close to him, thrusting her clenched fists into his face. “Oh, you brute, you cowardly brute! I wish I was a man like yourself to thrash you for it! I hate you. To think of your insulting me like that before them all!”

“I didn’t mention names,” protested Barend.

“’Tis a lie, I tell you, a cowardly lie,” she hurried on without heeding him. “Jan Hunkum’s not my father. I’m as respectable as the rest of you: my father was my mother’s husband; my name’s Eliza Brock!” She spat out the words in the fury of her vindication, her great eyes glared through the moving mist. “My mother’s a respectable woman!” she cried, “and I’m a respectable woman! Liars that you are! I’ve always hated all of you! Brute! My name’s Eliza Brock!”

“Yes, hush—hush, yes,” he stammered, confusedly, bewildered by her violence. “Make it Eliza Everts, that’s all I ask of you.”

“Oh, hold your tongue,” she answered, and all the fury had died out of the voice. “No, I won’t make it

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Liza Everts, because——" She hesitated. "I wonder," she said reflectively, "shall I tell you because why?"

"No need," he said bitterly. "You've told me already. You want to be rich, and I'm poor." He flung away from her, out of sight.

### III

PRESENTLY he stopped. The hovel lay behind him, in the drizzle and the mist. He stood staring at nothing.

"Oh, she needn't because me no becauses. I felt the because in her voice, plain enough. Lucky fellow, whoever he is, d—— him. I wonder who it is?" He stumbled forward and, as he went, his footfall grew heavier under him, with deliberate resolve.

"No, not with all the money, she'd never have taken me," he reasoned, "she don't want the money for herself, I'd never believe it of Liza. She wants it for *him*. A hundred times I've wanted it for her. Well, things are altered now. As she wants it, I suppose she must have it. I'd better speak to Mary at once." He turned aside towards the yellow blur which encircled the barber's window. "Pleasant work, Barend, you fool," he thought, "finding the needy for a rival!"

From Joop Sloop's came sounds of quarrelling and cursing, the usual Saturday evening row. Just as Barend drew near, the door sprang open suddenly, and, through a broad torrent of lamplight and blasphemy, a glittering silver piece plashed in the mud at his feet.

"Cheat your own sort, if you can!" yelled the barber.

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"You won't get a soul in this place to believe that Jan Hunkum 'd give you a counterfeit coin!"

"And I swear 'tis the florin I picked up this morning," Jaap Avis retorted shyly. He appeared in the light of the doorway, staggering as if from some invisible impetus. "Hands off, you seller of counterfeit gin! Get the Government to grant you a licence, and don't talk of 'coiners' to me! And give me my money back instantly! Give it me instantly, Sloop!"

"You can pick it up whenever you choose," rang the answer in Julia's metallic tones. "But you don't require it to pay me the twelve stivers you owe me—in coin of the realm!"

"It is a bad 'un," said Everts, who had been carefully testing the piece, "a fine bit o' work any man might be proud of." He pushed the florin into its owner's hand and entered the house. He understood the whole thing now with fresh admiration of old Jan's cunning. Jaap Avis, afraid to go in or go home, stood whining in the middle of the road.

"Where's Mary Brock?" asked Barend, peering into clouds of smoke. The louder women of the hamlet often look in on the Saturday shaving. "I can't tell why, for they let their beards grow," says the winking village constable.

"Here she is," cried Julia, whose red cheeks were empurpled with gin-fed emotion. "Here, Madame Mary Brock, here's Mr. Everts, Poacher. He's come to propose, in proper form, for the hand of your lovely daughter! He offers himself and all his traps."

"Hang you," said the violent-faced woman, and rose to her feet. Barend stood in the middle of the room, quietly contemplating Julia. "You're too clever by

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half," he said. "What an awful thing it 'd be for both if you was to marry a fool." She looked straight up at him, her eyes grown suddenly tender. "See here," he hurried on, "I want to have a talk with Mary. Let us into your room—can't you?—here at the back."

"No—no—no!" she cried—the words sprang from her lips like a troop of barking dogs. "Go out into the roadway—it's raining—nobody 'd ever disturb you there, not even——" She laughed and, with a defiant flourish, filled up her half-empty glass.

"Now the Lord 'a mercy on me, Barend Everts, and what can you want with me?" said the woman Brock. "You don't expect me—surely—to help you make love to Liza?"

Barend answered her meaningly—"If it was love I'd been after I'd never 'a come to you." He reproached himself for those cutting words as soon as they had left his lips. It was Julia's example, he fancied, made him spiteful, not his overwhelming, overbearing wretchedness.

"Look here," he continued, coming close to her, "I'm going to do what you want me to. So shut up and go home."

A hot light filled her vehement eyes. "I don't understand in the least," she answered significantly; "but I can't stand the smell in here any longer. So good-night, Julia; have a chat with Barend. Lord bless you, I don't mind!" And she lifted up her nose on high.

"Barend'll please himself," retorted the irate damsel, "without asking advice of you, though you certainly *might* be his mother! But you ain't. No, nor his mother-in-law, as yet. Have out your secret—with him presently. Nice little secrets, I dare say!"

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A hoarse laugh went up from all present : even the man under the knife grinned, with care.

Barend Everts sat himself down squarely, and called for a pennorth o' gin. "I thought you'd had liquor enough," exclaimed Julia, aflame with resentment. "Oh, bother," he answered crossly, "that was an hour ago." He sat contemplating his massive limbs, in dull repose. He was the strongest man in the room : he knew the fact, good-humouredly ; but of what avail is the greatest strength that a woman's laugh can break ?

He got up again and slouched out. In the doorway he looked at his watch. Five minutes to ten. As he went tramping back along the slushy road to the Brocks' outlying hovel, the distant chimes of Horstwyk faintly struck the hour.

About halfway, at a turn of the road, he heard a couple of voices behind a hedge. "So, then, it's settled for twelve to-night," a man was saying. Barend stopped.

"And that'll teach the old skinflint to play us tricks," the speaker continued. "You see, the richest part of it is, he can't even run to the police. Why, hasn't he told us all that his money is stolen already ? Then, how can any one steal it to-night ?"

"Ha ! Ha ! Ha !" laughed another voice. "He ought to have waited till to-morrow."

"Hush. Twelve, mind you. Look sharp." The principal speaker came breaking through the hedge as Barend noisily turned the corner. The two rivals challenged each other in usual peasant fashion, by a suspiciously spoken "Good-even."

"Fistycuffs," said Barend, "were you waiting for me ? Better not fight : I'm the stronger."

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"I'm not waiting to fight you," swore the bully, "I'm waiting for a girl."

In a lightning survey of the nearest cottages all possibilities flashed across Barend's brain. Liza's hut—thank Heaven!—was farthest off, a tumble-down shed by the dyke.

"I'm waiting for a girl," repeated Fistycuffs: "something must have happened, for she's always before time. The hussy, to keep *me* waiting! I'll box her ears if she don't come soon."

"A nice girl she must be," said Barend, scornfully, passing him.

"So she is—so her mother thinks. And I. And—other people. I'm going to marry her some day, if I choose, so I don't mind telling you her name." He put himself in a posture of possible defence. "'Tis Liza Brock," he said. Barend faced round.

"Look here, you'd better fight me," he said gently. "Better take your licking that way."

"Fight! Who's talking of fighting?" Fistycuffs began to retreat in alarm. "Don't be a fool, Barend Everts! Why shouldn't I marry a girl that's in love with me? And, d—— me, I will!"

"Do," said Barend, dropping his arm. He hastily continued his way.

Presently a shadow slipped past him, along the shiny hedgerow. He turned with a flood of scorn beating against his teeth. But he only called—

"Listen to me, Liza, a moment, please!"

She crept back sullenly, angry under this exposure. "I haven't time," she said, hurrying off.

"You're not really going to marry Fistycuffs?"

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"Yes, I am. So now you know. Well—that's what I'd like to have lots of money for."

"Hist! He won't make a good husband."

"He'll make a good husband to me."

"For why?"

"For why? Because I love him, Barend Everts. Can't you understand?"

"Hist! Don't speak too loud. Well, you *ain't* got the money at any rate. He'll have to wait a precious long time for that." Suddenly he resolved that *he* would not help her to secure this worthless prize. But he was a clumsy reader of woman's thoughts.

"You fool!" she answered. That was all.

"Liza, you only think you love him. For your own sake, Liza, wait a few months and make sure."

He was frightened by the fury this suggestion aroused in her. "What affair is it of yours," she cried, "why I marry and when? So mind your own business! I shall marry him in rags and be wretched, and love him for beating me because I'm as poor as himself! I shall love him because he's wicked and worthless, and brutal, and a bully! Just as I hate you because—because you're so good, and a fool!"

"Liza!" he cried with the cry of an animal in pain.

She buried her face in both hands, sobbing. "I'm going to marry him in a fortnight's time," she murmured. "I wouldn't wait—if I could."

"Could?" In spite of himself his voice roughened.

"Ay! could. You talk as if you were some fine nobleman, instead of just Everts of the Hemel. Who are *we*—if you please?" She ran sobbing down the road.

"My God!" said Barend Everts. Perhaps it was the first prayer he ever uttered. He thought no other

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thought till he stood in Mary Brock's untidy room—the living-room and sleeping-room, the whole untidy dwelling.

Mary Brock sat on a three-legged stool by the roaring fire. She had borrowed, from some neighbour, an armful of stolen sticks : the room was far too hot. Her clothes were inevitably dirty, but she had smoothed them somewhat, and damped her untidy hair into still more noticeable disorder. By taking off her cap she had unwittingly imparted a naked look to her head and shoulders ; about her surroundings there seemed a suggestion of putting to rights which made all the wrongs stand out.

"So!" she said in welcome. She pointed to a couple of bloaters which lay, a brilliantly golden spot, upon the dimly illumined table. "I got those for you," she said. "Leastways, I was passing." He sat down in silence, filling his mouth with the fish.

"Well?" she said, without any sign of impatience. In fact, she had waited until she saw that he had quite done with the bloaters. "Well?" He lay back, wiping his lips. Suddenly she turned round on him, her black eyes ablaze.

"Oh, no, hang it," he answered, and thrust back his chair. "Why, Mary, I'm after your daughter! Leastways 'was.'" His great hands dropped beside his chair : everything about him seemed to fall.

She dashed a log into the fireplace, scattering sparks and ashes far across the room.

"You're just crazy!" he exclaimed roughly. "You always was. I can't help your being crazy. Look here, Mary! Can you listen to me, like a woman that's sane?"

"Not if you tell stories, you cheat!"



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"I never told stories to you and I never cheated you. I've come about the paper. I always told you I should never use it."

"Then let me have it back to give to a better man than you."

"And this evening, at Joop Sloop's, I told you that I would,"

"So, you see, you lied all along!"

He took no notice of her unreasoning spite, but continued calmly—"Everything's changed now. She don't want me. She wants money. She don't want me. That's certain."

"You might have known that six months ago."

"Well, I didn't. Not for certain. Not before to-night."

She kicked at the fire. "I'm glad," she said, "glad, glad!"

"No, you're not: I don't believe it. Oh, don't begin shouting at me. I know exactly what *you* wanted and haven't got."

He loosened his vest and, from some inner pocket, drew forth a faded pocket-book. Out of this he produced a bit of dingy paper. "Here it is," he said, spreading it carefully out upon the table and thereby adding a stain from his bloated fingers. "Here it is, just as you gave it me six months ago." She snatched it up and made out the familiar words she could not have read—

"*This is to certify that Wilow Brock's daughter Eliza is my child,* JAN HUNKUM." And the place, and the date.

"When you gave me that six months ago," continued Barend, "you called it Liza's dowry. You wanted me to use it against Jan Hunkum. All of a

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sudden, one night, you put it into my hand. 'Here,' you said, 'here's Liza's dowry.' I was awful glad to have it, for I was awful sweet on Liza. Do you know why I was glad to have it? I'd have put it into the fire on the night of my wedding-day."

"Burnt it!" She rose, screaming. "Burnt it, you idiot! Burnt it!"

"Bad names don't break no bones, Mary, but they don't, neither, sound as pretty as you seem to think they do. Well, there's not going to be no wedding-day—leastways, not for me. And if Liza wants money that I needn't share, she must have it—seems to me, she wants it quick! So let me see what I can do to help her. 'Tisn't a pleasant job, so I'll get it over at once."

"Barend," said the woman by the fire, "you was always mighty particular, but if so be that everything's over 'twixt you and Liza——"

"Hist!" he said imperiously. The woman started: her dark cheeks sank. When she spake again, her voice had changed to an accustomed beggar's whine. "And the poor thing never doubts but she's Luke Brock's lawful daughter, and he gone a year and more before her birth, and me a poor starving widow that 'did' for the wicked, wheedling, wealthy——" She stopped. "God!" she burst out, "Now that he's lost his money, you come with your stupid—or, listen to me!"—her voice instinctively dropped to a whisper—"Did you take the money, Barend? You'll do the right thing by us. As soon as I heard, this morning, I thought that it must be you."

"Thank you," said Barend.

"But Liza!—she flew out in one of her rages!

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Barend, she says, 'll never catch nothing worth having but rabbits and hares."

"Did she say that?"

"Ay! she did. She knows what a fool you are."

Barend meditatively drew his finger through the grease of the empty dish.

"Give me a third—no, a quarter, Barend. Then you can keep the rest and the dockymment and Liza too."

Barend Everts stepped back roughly. "I haven't got the money," he said. "And I don't want—d——! I can't get—the girl. Can't you understand that I wouldn't take a penny from any man or woman living? 'Tis no fault of mine. I'm made that way."

"But you'd take hares," she interrupted spitefully.

"Now that it'll never be for me, in any case, I'll go to Jan Hunkum this night and get him to act a father's part to Liza, if I can. He's alive to-night, at any rate; the neighbours say he groaned all day. P'raps he's ill. I don't believe about the robbery. And supposing he was to die to-night, where'd Liza be? Penniless!" His eyes grew wistful: he was thinking.

"She'd have all the money," said Mary Brock.

He stared at her. "You don't know Government," he said. "Government don't give poor folks money. By George, if Jan won't act a father's part to Liza, I'll tell him this bit o' paper'll be stuck up to-morrow morning on the door of Horstwyk Church!"

"The parson'd pull it off," said Mary. Barend smiled down at his huge fists.

"I shouldn't do it, in course," he said, "to bring shame on Liza. But 'tis a fair threat, and I hope it'll bring him round."

"What do you call a father's part?" said Mary.

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"I dunno. *My father's part was kicks.*"

"I'd do it better myself!" cried Mary, springing up in sudden doubt. "Always supposing the old rogue gets his money back! You're that good-natured and simple, you don't know money's worth. I'd—I'd always made up my mind to wait till the moment he was dead, then I'd have taken my dockymment straight to the Burgomaster, and he'd 'ave given me every penny of which my lawful daughter's father died possessed! She'll be a rich girl some day, will my lawful daughter. That's why I wanted you to have her, Barend. And you could, if you choose."

"In course I could," retorted Barend moodily "That's why she's sweet on Fistycuffs."

Mary Brock again kicked the faggots. "She's sweet on Fistycuffs, and when she's done being sweet on Fistycuffs, she'll want to marry you!"

"I'd thank you for no man's leavings."

"Please yourself. But when a man loves a woman like you love Liza, the best thing he can do is to love her for better and for worse. He can't help himself. Lor! 'Tis no man's leavings. Mark my word! she loves you—and she's in love with Fistycuffs. And if you weren't a fool, you'd take what you can get."

"And as I *am* a fool," he cried, banging his fist on the table—"Give me that paper back, and let me go!"

"Lord!" said the woman, in astonishment. Presently she held out the dirty scrap in silence. He took it, rose, and buttoned it out of sight.

"Never you talk," he said, "of taking this to Burgomasters. Once Jan Hunkum is dead, 'tis a bit of waste paper."

She made no reply, turning her back on him and on the light.

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"'Cause I know," he continued, nettled. "For why? Once a man dies—in our class of life—his mother goes to the lawyers. My mother—she came from beyond the Rhine, you know—she had an aunt that died and left a hundred thousand guilders—a hundred thousand guilders. There was thirteen heirs turned up and seven lawyers, and in all the five years till mother died she got two thousand paid her—and oh, the heartsore and worry of getting that! She left it all in the Bank at Dordrecht, and two years later they wrote to say it had all got lost in shares! Shares for the lawyers, I s'pose they meant, and for themselves and Government. We never got a penny. Oh, that's why I hate the sight of a broadcloth coat in the streets, Mary. If it belongs to the man inside—he's stolen it!"

She took no notice.

In the doorway he stopped. "Kind thanks for the bloaters, Mary," he said, and, as she neither turned nor answered him, he slammed the door.

### IV

OUTSIDE, he looked at his watch, a great, absurd thing, like a tin bun. The dull flare from the clouded window fell across its face.

"Nearly eleven," he said, "and they settled for twelve."

The mist had thickened to a steady downpour. The ground was steaming; the desolate expanse, with its scattered hovels and black potato-plots, lay pitchy dark.

As he went along, Barend's thoughts were of the miscreants preparing to attack old Hunkum. Apparently

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they were pleasant thoughts, for he kept complacently slapping his heavy thighs.

Presently the yellow zone of gravel shone in front of him. He crunched across it towards the silent door.

He was about to knock, but checked himself. The old man inside was stone deaf, when he chose, and would certainly never open, however plainly he might hear. An intending visitor, at this hour—or at any other, unless the man had been invited—could only obtain admittance by forcing his way in. Barend passed slowly round the little house, inspecting its irresponsive shutters. Foolishly enough, he had not foreseen this difficulty. The faint chimes from Horstwyk steeple came thrilling through the night.

At the back of the house, by the kitchen-entry, was a little window, with bars outside. Before this he stood half a minute, meditating; then, with a swift clench of both fists, he tore one of the bars toward him. It came away shrieking, amongst a shower of splinters from the broken window-frame. One moment he waited, gasping for breath. Then he wrenched out a second bar, and a third; the great beads of perspiration stood cold upon his forehead. With the formidable weapon he now held in his hands he struck aside the glass panes and the shutter behind them, and so passed into a tiny pantry, groping his way amongst empty shelves.

He listened, expectant. Amidst the swash of the rain outside a sudden creak of timber told him how undisturbed the stillness of the house remained. He found no difficulty in forcing the lock of the pantry door, and so obtained admittance to the passage, also dark. Here he hung back, for the awe of the living silence fell upon him.

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"Over yonder's his bedroom door," he reflected. "How early the old man goes to bed. And to sleep? Old people don't sleep much, they say. Surely this one shouldn't." He hated Liza's father, with all the contempt of a diametrically opposite nature. Indolence and wastefulness were the faults he condoned.

He pushed along the wall to the door through which he had passed that morning with all the rest. It was a queer thought that here he was burglariously entering Jan Hunkum's house, to protect Jan Hunkum's property on every Hemeler's behalf except his own!

And now, as his fingers touched the handle, he felt that his night's work was going to begin. There was no light whatever visible from the inside. Presumably, therefore, the room was as dark as the rest of the house. Or was it possible so laboriously to close up all the chinks that not a ray could pierce panel or shutter? Was it thinkable that, behind this enclosing blackness, there should be light and life? Perhaps, even now, the old man, sitting up in the great green bedstead, was watching with dilated eyeballs each twist of the door-knob? The suspense of these invisible eyes became unbearable to Barend: he flung his full weight against the door, and, as it broke away before him, he fell forward into the middle of the room.

A bright lamp stood on the table by the bed. Jan Hunkum sat erect, against the pillows, without sign of hurt or sickness, his skinny red face in a tremble, the grey locks, under the knitted nightcap, dark upon his contorted brows. On the table lay piled a heap of papers, under the glare of the lamp—business papers, mortgages, bonds—some of them had fallen to the floor beside a gaping money-chest; others mingled on the

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counterpane with bundles of banknotes and a glitter of scattered gold. The intruder started back before the agonized appeal of the old man's motionless stare.

"I haven't come to hurt you!" he shouted. "Haven't come to rob you, don't you hear?" There was no response whatever. "Haven't come to rob you," he repeated, "rob you, rob you." Old Hunkum lifted a shaky finger and pointed to the iron bar. Barend dropped it impatiently, from his unconscious grasp, on the foot of the great green bed.

He drew nearer to explain his object, and in doing so struck against the open chest, evoking a gentle jingle from its depths. The miser shrieked in eager response and flung himself across the widespread treasures in front of him, his hooked fingers gathering up banknotes and tumble-down piles of metal, in a vain endeavour to cover them all, as a hen her too numerous brood. The nightshirt fell open from his panting chest; his whole face was now working; his scream died away to a crooning appeal still more piteous to hear.

"Now, listen to me," cried Barend, bending over him. "Listen to me, Jan Hunkum, and do as you please. But I've come to help you—to help you, so help me God! Do you believe me now? In less than an hour a couple of scoundrels will be here—burglars—coming to rob you—coming to kill you. And I'll help you—do you hear me?—against them—help you."

The old man still bent forward, staring his terrified, unmeaning stare, and impotently raking the counterpane.

"There's no time to lose, so I'd better be very plain," continued Barend, bending his burly form between Hunkum's face and the lamp. "I'll help you to keep



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your confounded cash, but, by Heaven, if I do, Jan Hunkum, you must make an honest use of a little of it at last! I've got in my pocket here"—he slapped his chest—"the paper you wrote for Mary Brock. Liza's *your* child, Jan Hunkum. I don't want to call an old man names, but twenty years ago—I *will* say that—you weren't a better man than you are to-day. Liza's your child, bought with *bread*! If you want to keep the rest of all this stuff here you said was stolen, you must give me an honest lump of it—a good, fair, honest lump of it—for your daughter Liza to-night!" He caught up a handful of banknotes and scattered them loosely over the floor.

Then Jan Hunkum found rapid speech. "Pity a poor old man," he said hoarsely. "Have mercy on a poor old man, a poor old man." His visitor stood looking down on him, with squarely-folded arms.

"Liza Brock's going to marry," Barend said. The old man cast up at him a quick leer of contemptuous penetration. "She's going to marry," Barend continued steadily, "a good-for-nothing brute. As long as she's able to support him, he won't ill-treat her. So you must settle the money on your daughter—say ten thousand guilders—you must give them me to take away to-night. You're not listening: I don't believe you hear me. It doesn't matter." He raised his voice. "Ten thousand florins to-night, at once, for your daughter Liza—or I leave you to your fate!"

"Have pity on a poor old man," said the miser.

"Leave you to be robbed of every penny lying here—and you will be!" Barend forgot his professed respect for old age. "And why shouldn't I, you thief?" he cried. "Why shouldn't other thieves have as much

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right to the gold as you ? ” He unloosened his arms. His eyes flashed.

“ To all my relations, when I die,” mumbled the miser. “ To you, and the rest. You’re my cousin also, Barend Everts. First cousin once removed. I’m an old man. I only want to die in peace.”

“ You lie,” said Barend sternly. “ By entering this house to-night, I have given up all chance of any share in your inheritance. I know it; we all know it. You lie.” He picked up a ten-guilder note. “ I don’t want your dirty money,” he added, slowly. “ Some small share—as much as this ?—would have come to me some day, I suppose. Let me have it now, so you may see for yourself what I do with it ! ” He waved the flimsy scrap of paper over the lamp. To his astonishment the old man leaped aloft and fell upon him, tearing it away.

“ Gently,” said Barend, stepping back.

“ It’s blackmail ! ” cried Jan Hunkum furiously. “ It’s infamous imposture and robbery ! Why don’t you kill me at once and have done with me ? Take all the money and kill me and go, you hulking beast of a poacher ! ”

For answer Barend drew forth his precious document and held it on high. “ Do you recognize this or not ? ” he asked. “ Do you dare to deny that Liza is your child ? ”

The miser sank back among his pillows. “ I deny nothing,” he said. “ I’ll leave her ten thousand guilders. I’ll leave her twenty thousand. Be a good husband to her. I’ll leave *you* twenty thousand guilders. Go away now. I’ll make a new, expensive will.”

“ She shan’t wait till you’re dead ! ” exclaimed Barend,

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brandishing his document. "For one thing, she'd never get a penny! Once you're dead, all your money will go to the notaries and Government! That's a pleasant reflection—the notaries and Government. So now, while you've got it, give a little to your daughter that needs it! Your daughter that's in rags and in—give it her! Give it her at once!" He began passionately shuffling the papers that lay on the table; his broad shadow darkened the bed. "I see you don't believe a single word of all that I've been saying. It's true, all the same, and I'll settle those fellows for you in a jiffy. But you give me the money for Liza! Look here; I don't understand about these papers."

He did not perceive that the old man's arm went stealthily gliding down to the bed-foot, down to the iron bar which lay there. "Now, for instance, tell me honestly, what is this bundle worth?" He turned, and, in turning, sprang aside: the heavy bar came whizzing past him; his arm, thrown up in hasty self-defence, upset the petroleum lamp. With a crash it exploded, amongst a sudden blaze of papers: the yellow flames ran up the thin green curtains of the bed. The miser's murderous weapon clanged upon the money-chest; the old man himself, borne down by the weight of his futile blow, fell forward, right into the flames. He did not seem to feel or, if he felt, to regard the spread of the swift conflagration, but plunged frantically deeper, his naked arms outstretched, clutching at the charred fragments that sailed away everywhere around him on broadening rivers of fire, while from his lips all the time broke a rapid succession of moans like the plaint of a wounded beast. Barend, in his first bewilderment, had run to the washstand, ignorantly seeking fuel for the

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furnace : to his open-mouthed amazement it seemed like a judgment from Heaven that water should cause flames to increase ! But after a moment of stupefied staring, he flung himself into the burning mass and dragged out the old man, who shrieked and struck wildly again and again in the fierceness of unavailing resistance, amid the crackle of paper and the clatter of gold. Desperately fighting his way to the bed, Barend tore himself loose from the miser's clutches, and sprang to pull down the blazing hangings and to cast the dead blackness of the bedclothes—the counterpane, the mattresses, the coat off his own back—across the abyss of flame and smoke. In another moment it was all over. He stood, uncertain, in utter darkness and dirt.

Presently he struck a match, and found a tallow candle, and, coughing away the clouds around him, he looked round. Jan Hunkum lay on the floor, his right hand once more fiercely clasping the murderous iron bar ; his eyes were closed : there was a splatter of blood all about him.

Barend Everts knew nothing of sickness, and little of death. His father had been shot in a poaching affray ; his mother had died in a fit : for the rest, his pathological experiences were confined to the animal world. When a hare had a hole like that behind its ears it was done for. He gently turned the old man on his back again : the eyes were dull ; the breath had stopped. Jan Hunkum was dead : he, Barend Everts, was somehow mixed up with his death. The miser must have fallen—perhaps in taking fresh aim ?—and in falling must have struck against a corner of the chest. But what did these particulars matter ? When Government finds a man killed and a live man beside him, it says that the live man has

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murdered the dead one—at least, if the live man's poor.

There was no more to be done for Jan Hunkum. Barend rose slowly to his feet and ran from the room.

He struck his elbow against the wall of the passage—he struck his face against the wall of the pantry—at last he was out of the window, out in the rain.

He tried to understand what had happened. His heart throbbed into his brain. He couldn't, and once more he hated himself for a fool. It was he who had upset the lamp. He wondered: had he murdered Jan Hunkum twice—from a legal point of view? Did they punish you twice, if so? He knew nothing of legal subtleties, except that they invariably exculpate the wealthy and inculcate the poor.

He wished the night was darker. It was horribly, brutally light. He could not remain standing there on the shiny gravel: the whole world was watching him, before and behind—especially behind—from a thousand staring eyes. He flung himself to the ground and crept, on hands and feet, across the soaked potato-fields.

He laboriously reached a plantation of oak brushwood, and in a dry ditch alongside it sank panting. Baronial brushwood, he reflected bitterly—anxiously. The Great—the Government—the vague, ever-present Oppressor! He looked down at his clothes, at his hands. He was all over slimy clay, miserably dirty. A good thing he had on his grey work-a-day shirt, not tomorrow's shiny white one. Yonder, that twinkle far down along the ditch was Liza's hovel. Jan Hunkum was dead. Well, Fistycuffs might come and take the money now. He, just as well as the Government.

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### V

"But you love me, Fisty?"

"Yes."

"Say you love me, then!"

"In course I love you, confound you."

"Kiss me, then."

"Not I. Not as long as you call me Fisty."

"But, Ferdy, I like to call you Fisty. It sounds strong. Like as if you could beat me."

"So I could beat you. And so I will, if you go on forgetting my name's Ferdinand."

"Could—could!" She drew herself up haughtily, and leisurely inspected her naked brown arm. Then she fell back into her former tone. "Don't be disagreeable, Ferdy. I love you so. If you only loved me as I love you!"

He shook himself impatiently. "And what am I marrying you for?" he said. "Your money, I suppose?"

"Don't, Ferdy. You'd like me to have money, shouldn't you?—I wish I had; I wish I had."

Her voice grew miserable, for the shadow crossed her soul of a love which longed for gold—to give it her!

He had been lolling against the pig-stye; his manner suddenly grew businesslike. "Why, what a fool I am!" he said. "I never thought of it before! Look here, you're as strong as a man, Liza—though I could lick you with half a hand—you could do a man's work any day, couldn't you?"

"Couldn't I?" said Liza proudly. "And—what's more!—when we're married, I will. I'll work for you

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all day long, Ferdy, like mother worked for father, and Aunt Judy works for uncle, and——”

“ Oh, shut up, do,” he interrupted impatiently. “ You women always talk as if we did nothing. As if watching all night for rabbits were nothing, with the beastly moonlight, and all the risk, and things ! But I didn’t want to bother about that. Curse the stupid chatter. Look here, Liza Brock, you want to marry me, don’t you ? ”

“ I do,” she said, and took his hand and kissed it.

He shook her off.

“ And the sooner the better ? ”

“ The sooner the better, indeed ! ” Her voice trembled. She folded her hands in front of her.

“ Then the sooner we’ve got the necessary funds, the better for us both,” he said doggedly. “ I’m not going to marry you till then, mind that.”

“ I haven’t got any money, and I can’t get any, Ferdy. I shouldn’t know how. But once we’re married, I’ll——”

“ Oh, stop your confounded bleating. It’s *I* will get the money, but you can lend a hand. I’m going to leave this confounded hole and take you with me. I’m going to be a fine gentleman, Liza, and you shall be a lady. The thing’d have been done by now but that long-armed Pete—the funk!—pretended he heard a noise. No matter : he won’t split : there’ll be all the more for us.”

“ It is late—past twelve,” said Liza nervously. “ I must be getting back through the window. Mother will find me out.”

“ What, you funking too ! ” cried the man with a thunderous oath. “ Look you here : I haven’t called you out for any fooling, mind you. Listen to me. You

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must help me to-night to get Jan Hunkum's money. It's a beastly shame, this new-made will of his, that every one's talking about!—wasting all his money where it can't do nobody no good. *We'll* get it, and away to America to-morrow! I shall have to give something to Pete, I suppose, and he and his noises be hanged."

He had listened to his own voice in speaking. A long silence ensued.

"I'm not a thief," said Liza, almost inaudibly.

"Aren't you? Well, then, you're a thief's wife. I could do it by myself, if I didn't feel a bit uncomfortable about that creepy noise."

"Oh, Fisty, don't. There's no money, Fisty. Why, it was stolen away last night—you know it was—and old Hunkum half murdered. Didn't you see him this morning, with his head done up in bandages? There isn't any money there—I know there isn't—there isn't——"

He struck at her, and she started back. "Hold your jaw, you fool!" he blustered. "I can see through the cunning old devil, if you cannot. Nobody can among these drunken idiots, and that's my chance! Fetching the plunder away to-night's as safe as safe can be. He can never say he's been robbed to-night, for there's nothing left to take!" He laughed.

"I don't care. I'm not a thief," said Liza Brock. And she added in a lower key—"Supposing I was, of all the people in the world, I wouldn't rob Jan Hunkum."

"Whew!" said Fistycuffs. Then he burst out—"So that's what you flaunt in my face, do you? A nice respectable sort of person you are to have moral



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sentiments! Why, you idiot, it's *no* robbery in your case; that's where the moral sentiments comes in! It's taking your own—what belongs to you—from an unnatural old wretch who wants to waste it upon strangers. That's what I feel all along. Now that I'm going to marry Jan Hunkum's daughter, it's my duty to her—to you, don't you see?—to secure the inheritance of which he's defrauding her." He mispronounced the word "defrauding," but he rolled out the whole long sentence like a much-repeated task.

A horrible light flared up in her heart, but she beat it down. "It's a lie!" she exclaimed. "No, I don't mean that, Ferdy, but you do worrit one so! It's all a lie got up against mother and me. It's all Aunt Judy's doing, the hateful, spiteful thing! Mother's as honest as the best of them. I don't say she don't drink! I don't say she don't swear! That'd be silly of me. But she's honest—do you hear?—as the best of them! I like Jan Hunkum, 'cause he says 'Good-day' to me, mornings, regular, when I take round the bread. That's his way of being kind. And I won't have him robbed, so there!"

"You won't, will you? You won't? Take that." His patience was overwrought; he stepped forward and slapped her cheek with the full force of his open hand.

"Don't," she said, "Don't, Ferdy!"

"Will you come with me up to Jan Hunkum's, or will you have some more?"

"I'll have some more," she said.

He struck her again and again, till, wearied of his blows, or perhaps inflamed by them, she ran upon his

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breast, between his open arms. Under their double weight, as they stumbled backwards, the wretched door of the pig-shed swung open, and together they rolled into the litter, among the pigs. For a moment they struggled there amidst grunts and squeakings: then, suddenly, she started up, leaped through the dim light of the entry, and shot the outside bolt. "Promise not to go near Hunkum to-night!" she gasped, one hot cheek against the door.

His answer was a volley of oaths.

"Promise me," she pleaded. "Promise, Ferdy!"

"I'll promise to murder him the moment I get out," he shrieked. "And I'll black your black eyes till they're blue!"

"Promise me," she pleaded—"promise, Ferdy!"

"Let me out this instant, you huasy," was the only answer she received.

"I can't allow you to hurt Jan Hunkum," she repeated desperately, with her hand on the bolt. She ran away from the door and ran back to it, half mad with alarm and uncertainty. She could hear him hitting the lumbering swine in his rage, as he shouted and swore. Furious, he called out to her the whole villany of his lovemaking: the report, picked up in a tavern, that Jan Hunkum had made her his heiress, the sudden alarm of the pretended robbery, the discomfiture of to-night's new will! She stood trembling as the wave swept down on her; she sank on her knees. "Promise me," she repeated mechanically. "Don't, Ferdy, don't! I love you!" She had never learnt to pray, but she cried out to God to influence—somehow—Fistycuffs. Not that she believed He could do it. "Promise me! Promise me!" she cried; her

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voice was hoarse with yearning. Gradually the useless petition died away: she lay against the door in the drizzle, with a sickness swelling at her throat. Presently a human grunt arose among the swinish ones, a grunt which steadied to a snore. Fistycuffs had fallen asleep, his head on a rough pink belly. She lay listening, and, in the general appeasement, her own passion sank to rest.

When she awoke, it was early dawn, grey, grizzly. Her mother was standing over her, abusing her violently, with occasional kicks, like commas. She started to her feet.

"Slut!" said Mary Brock, half a dozen times in quick succession, with evident enjoyment of the hateful word. "Bring down disgrace on your respectable mother by the life you lead! That I should have lived to behold such a daughter! I was respectable."

"Hush, hush, mother; I know you was." Liza looked round confusedly. "I like you for it. Well, I'm not. Well, I can't help it. A good many people aren't. In these parts at any rate."

"At least say it was Fistycuffs?" questioned Mary with real interest.

"Of course it was Fistycuffs!" exclaimed Liza, aflame. "Mother, what do you take me for? He came by the window, near midnight, and I just slipped out for a talk. When he went away, I leant, thinking, against the pig-stye, and I must have fallen asleep."

"More fool you," said Mary Brock. "Well, come away. It's Sunday, you stupid: you've got to be half an hour earlier to-day."

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"Don't I know?" replied the girl peevishly. She crept away to the house. Ten minutes later she looked into the pig-stye apprehensively: it was empty.

She earned her living by trudging round, twice daily, with her heavy basket of baker's bread. Twice a day she had to fetch it, first from Horstwyk, the village which lies three miles away. What with crossing and recrossing the potato-fields, in a continuous zig-zag, her daily perambulations from cottage to cottage must have filled eight hours or more. She was proud, with sullen pride, of working amongst a hundred loafers, and especially made it a point of honour, and of all-absorbing interest, to secure unwilling settlements from the most insolvent customers. For the Hemelers, too lazy to bake their own supply of bread, were still less anxious to pay for it. The girl, hardly able to read and oblivious of early pothooks, scratched together mysterious accounts which completely bewildered the baker, in all but their final satisfactory result.

On Sundays she had to be half an hour earlier, so that her customers might eat their breakfast tranquilly before they went to church. They always ate their breakfast tranquilly. They never went to church.

This Sunday morning she started along the straight long road, between the straight tall poplars, thinking, thinking, all the way to Horstwyk, how she could possibly save Jan Hunkum from her lover. She shivered in the naked November silence that lay pale across the shivering earth. The dawn spread white and thin, like an ancient virgin whose locks no longer hide the baldness underneath.

She was not afraid of Fistycuffs, for she fancied that, whatever he might do to her, she should rather like his

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doing it. Supposing he killed her ? She shut her eyes, along the bare blank road, and tried to feel him killing her. But he mustn't hurt Jan Hunkum. No, above all, she must warn Jan Hunkum.

Presently he would come out to her, as he always did, for his hump of rye-bread. He got special daily fractions nowadays, his toothless gums having quite refused to masticate the cheap stale bread he had bought so long. He would come out and he would say—"Good morning, girl," and then he would go in again. Must she catch him by the tail of his coat and cry—"Beware of Fistycuffs"? No, never Fistycuffs. "Jan Hunkum, they don't believe you've been robbed already. Somebody's coming to rob you soon. They'd have been here to-night but that somebody stopped them. Somebody ? Who ? Somebody ?—I !"

She could not say so much. She could not say enough. One question would lead to another. The police would get mixed up in the matter. She would end by betraying Fistycuffs.

Her heart stood still. She must save Jan Hunkum.

She cared nothing for the miser. Rather, she disliked him for the rumour which mixed up with his, in shameful promiscuity, her mother's good name and her own. But he had spoken civilly to her through all these years ; moreover, he had always paid. Few of the Hemelers did either. Besides, Jan Hunkum had rough words for every one he spoke to, excepting her.

So she plodded on her daily round till his turn came. Then she resolutely walked towards the gravel-plot. She would trust to the intuition of the moment.

As she neared the shiny little house, in the rawness of the grim November morning, she watched to see the

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green door open, and the old man totter out. Nothing stirred. It was cold this morning—~~she~~ never minded weather; but the old man was growing feebler: perhaps she might be a trifle early. With a calm beginning of surprise she knocked.

She knocked again—and waited. And then before that unaccustomed irresponsiveness a sudden terror flashed across her brain. Supposing Fistycuffs—during her culpable slumbers—had got away and done the deed!

She shrieked aloud and, without thought of the laden basket on her arm, began tearing round the cottage. In another moment she halted, breathless, ashamed, her basket empty, its contents scattered right and left. Very contritely, she stooped to collect them, although she knew by this time that something must indeed have happened inside the silent house, for not even her crazy conduct had caused its single inhabitant to stir.

She soon found the little back window, with the black bars lying under it. One was missing. Then she knew that for the first time in her life she was face to face with crime—with what she would consider crime. She stood away from the walls, and the walls stared back at her. A fit of trembling seized her. "It is behind us," said the walls. "It is horrible. No wonder you feel afraid."

She sank on her knees. She *was* afraid. Though she could hardly have said of what. Not of meeting burglars.

Presently she fancied she heard a sound inside the house. She looked up, listening. The air was so still, she held her breath. And then she knew she had heard it again, low and distinct—a groan!

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She started to her feet. Two men stood watching her, beside the peat-shed, their figures clear against the morning light. She stared into their faces.

"Oh, Ferdy!" she gasped.

"Let's call somebody," he answered, white as she. "Let's go home." He seized her by the arm. "Come away!"

"No!" she answered, fiercely resisting him. "No! No! No!" He read the terror in her eyes.

"It's no doing of mine!" he cried. "I swear it isn't! Whatever it is, 'tis no doing of mine! How could it be when you kept me locked up in that beastly place till daybreak? Here, Pete, swear we've got nothing to do with it. God, there it is again!"

"Hush," said the girl, shuddering. "I don't care for Pete's oaths. Nor for anybody's oaths. Look me in the face, Fisty, before we go in, and say it wasn't you!"

"It wasn't——" began Fistycuffs. "Confound it, what do you mean by 'going in'? Hark, there it is again!"

"I'm going through the window," said the girl.

"No: you're not," he cried, in a fury. "Nor are we—eh—are we, Pete? You've forget about the will: that's like you, Liza! From the cottages a dozen eyes may be watching us; if you're seen to go inside, you lose your money, once for all."

Liza picked up her bread-basket and stood reflecting. Should the miser die, she would be rich. Often and often her mother had boasted that Hunkum's death would prove Liza to be his heiress, his nearest relative, his—niece. She understood nothing about the laws of inheritance. She fully believed in the "niece."

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In a few hours then, possibly, she would be rich. Jan Hunkum had probably been plundered, but of course the police would recover the treasure. And, in any case, as Barend Everts had remarked last night, rich people might be robbed of much, but they couldn't be plundered poor.

She would be rich. She wanted to be rich. Fisty-cuffs would marry her then and be good to her.

She dropped her basket and looked at him. The moan from the cottage seemed to pass between them.

"I'm going through the window," she said.

He sprang at her with an oath. "Never," he cried, "never while I live. Here—help me, Pete!" Unconsciously, if seemed to her, she struck out at him, straight from the shoulder, toppling him over, motionless, flat on his back.

Then she dragged herself up through the window, without as much as a glance at hang-dog Pete.

The whole house was full of smoke and burning. Disconcerted at this, she went back to the pantry, and took up a knife from where it lay beside the miser's untasted supper of bread and fat. She noticed that the few objects on the shelves were clean and tidily arranged. For, in contrast with the horde of his relations, Jan Hunkum was neat.

She walked quickly into the bedroom, her knife in her hand.

The bedroom was dimly dark, full of fumes and smell. And Jan Hunkum lay stretched across the floor. So much she saw in entering. She shuddered back to the door, for fear of a possible assassin concealed in the darkness, watching. The next moment she flung herself boldly across to a window, drew a bolt, raised



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a bar, turned back a shutter : a chink of grey light fell thin across the floor.

All the time she faced round to that heap in the middle, to the centre of all her considerations, the moan. Jan Hunkum lay amongst the disorder of wraps and bedclothes, with his treasures scattered about him. She had never seen gold before. For a moment the sight caught her breath. Jan Hunkum's fortune, then, had neither been invented nor carried off. Gold ! Here was the one thing all men lived for. Jan Hunkum was dying for it.

She knelt beside the old man, resolutely, and perceived with surprise that his fingers clutched, in an attitude of attack, the missing iron bar. She loosened them with difficulty and pushed the bar aside.

Jan Hunkum's eyes were closed ; he was probably but semi-conscious. As she tried to lift him up, he shrieked, and she saw that his naked arms and breast were terribly burnt. She propped up his head, and went for some water, dazed, wondering if water was good for burns.

She could do nothing. Whenever she touched him, he screamed. " Alone ! " he murmured several times. His eyes remained closed.

She sat down on the floor beside him, helpless, and her eyes mechanically wandered across a crumpled scrap of paper that lay open in the twilight. She thought it was money, like all the rest.

I hereby certify that Liza Brock is my daughter.

JAN HUNKUM.

She read it over and over again, dully wondering what it meant, while yet she had instantly realized

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every word. She got upon her feet again, and stared down at her father.

She hated him with a hate that suddenly filled her whole soul like a furnace. She clenched her fists tight, lest she should strike at the upturned face. She would have rejoiced to fall upon him and tear out his wicked grey hair and beard; she would gladly have stamped on his prostrate body. The fury of her denial swept across her like a storm. She bent both hot cheeks down to his.

"Can't I do anything for you?" she said softly. "Not anything at all?"

At the sound of her voice he opened his eyes, and recognized her. He saw the paper she clutched in one hand—Barend Everts' "document." Their glances met.

He struggled to say something, between his groans. It was a piteous something, by the piteous expression of his disfigured features; he struggled, for a moment, with the vehemence of despair. Then, suddenly, she saw the eyeballs roll up as the head fell back, and the whole body collapsed. She had never seen death before. Horror-struck, she knew it at once.

She stood motionless. Presently she burst into a torrent of indignant outcries. "It's a lie! It's a lie!" she repeated again and again, in the presence of the dead man, as if to shame him. She tore the palms of her hands with her teeth. "It's a lie! It's a cowardly, devilish lie!" But the conviction had gone from her voice.

"Well!" she said aloud, with desperate resolve, "if I'm—his daughter, I can marry Fistycuffs. All this money's mine, I suppose." Her voice dropped. "I

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wonder what's the worth of a bundle such as this? I'm the richest woman in the neighbourhood." She pushed aside some of the confusion around her, drawing the bed-clothes over the body in decent covering. And out of the tangle she disengaged the remnants of a broken petroleum lamp and also a half-soaked pea-jacket.

She snatched at the latter with a cry. It wasn't Ferdinand's, thank God! Yet she fancied she had seen it before. It belonged to Barend Everts.

Barend! The whole thing flashed upon her. Barend had come here and done this deed, because she had told him how much she wanted money. For her sake he had killed Jan Hunkum, little dreaming that she was indeed Jan Hunkum's child. Perhaps the old man had produced the paper? Perhaps—more probably—Barend had never heard of it. However that might be, it was her ignoble greed that had killed her father for his gold.

"Not I," she murmured miserably, hiding her face in the sodden pea-jacket. "Ferdinand, Ferdinand,"—and she found herself pitying Barend, the murderer.

Somebody stood watching her; his eyes drew up hers to his face. She sprang away from him. "You did it, Barend!" she cried. "You! You! Murderer!"

He did not answer, staring stupidly. Through the gloomy half-light she could see something of the condition he was in. His clothes and hands were caked with clay; his head was bare.

"You've killed him," she continued, "a poor helpless old man. All the world shall know how brutally you killed him. I shall tell. They will punish you—dreadfully. And I—I——" She stopped. Would she be glad?

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"And you will marry Fistycuffs," he said drearily. He stepped forward to take up the jacket.

"No," she said. "That is part of my evidence."

He turned on her, gently withal. "You won't need evidence," he said, "I'm my own evidence. I'm going to give myself up."

For a moment she stood silent. Then she burst out—"Don't do that! For God's sake, don't do that! Don't you know that the people who give themselves up are always condemned?"

"I know," he answered. "When Government gets hold of you, it doesn't let you go. Especially if you're innocent," he added bitterly.

"But you're *not* innocent!" she cried quickly. "Oh, I can't bear the thought of it. Go!"

Again he looked at her. "You really feel quite sure I killed your father?" he said. The new word caused her to wince. "Well, perhaps I did," he added. "It don't really matter much. I shall give myself up to the constables, and you can marry Fistycuffs."

She came after him. "I can't help it. I don't understand at all. I love Fistycuffs. I always knew you were the better man. And now you've killed my father. He *was* my father, Barend. I'm not even a respectable girl. I hate him, though he's dead. Perhaps that's why I can't be as angry with you as I ought to be. I know 'tis very wicked. But Fistycuffs is going to marry me. He *must*. Barend!"

"Yes." He stopped in the pantry door.

"Barend, you can't leave the house. He's outside."

"If so, he saw me climb through the little window. I *had* to come back and see after the old man. I couldn't help myself. But I'm not afraid of Fistycuffs."

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"Barend, say you didn't do it because of anything I said!"

"Didn't do what? Oh, yes, all right. I didn't do it because of anything you said."

"Barend—listen! Listen! Don't give yourself up!"

He did not answer; already he was climbing to the window.

"For my sake!" she pleaded wildly. "Don't say anything! Wait and see!"

"For your sake?" He smiled drearily. "Very well. I don't understand what's really happened. Not a bit. But, then, I'm a fool. For your sake? Very well. Good-bye."

She was once more alone in the house with the dead man. She forced herself to go back for one last look at him, her father. The pea-jacket lay on the floor, forgotten. She took it up and, fastening it round her waist as best she could, clumsily hid it away. She crept out of the house, crying. She had not been in it more than a quarter of an hour.

She took up her bread-basket, looking around her. At first there was no sign of Fistycuffs. Daylight had come. To which of the distant cottages should she bear the news?

Fistycuffs stole from behind the kitchen wall. "It's stopped," he whispered. "Well?" Then he added immediately: "Come away off the gravel, you fool. Come behind the house."

"There's no danger," she answered, slowly following. "On Sundays none of 'em wakes till I calls 'em. There's only Jan Hunkum I have to go to first, this side." She shuddered.

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"And you won't wake *him*," said Fistycuffs. "Liza, you might just as well have done it with *me*. I didn't mean murder. Is the money there, I say? How much of it did you bring away with you? Hang it, you jade, what were you doing in there with Everts?"

"Did you see him?" she cried in alarm.

"Blood and thunder, what do you mean?" he cried. "See him? I'll tear your heart out! One of his friends knows who the murderer is! All the worse for the murderer!"

"Hold your tongue," she said, outwardly calm. "When Barend came, Hunkum was dead. I'm going over yonder to give the alarm."

"To give the alarm that you found the house closed!" he cried with ill-checked excitement. "Have you again forgotten, fool, that it's ruin to have been inside?"

"No, I haven't," she made answer. A dogged something in her voice and expression disconcerted him.

"Don't expect me to marry you," he said brutally, "unless you get your share."

"Ferdy!"—suddenly she flung herself at his feet—"you won't marry me anyhow, Ferdy."

"I can see!"—he grinned; "that's why there's such a hurry about this marriage." His voice changed. "Curse it! Everts?" he said.

She rose to her feet. "You are mad," she said, not less fiercely. "I mean that my mother—that I *am* Jan Hunkum's daughter. I can't help it. I'm so sorry. Oh, Ferdy—I couldn't but tell you—say you will!"

"I'll marry you fast enough," he answered, "if you

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make it worth my while. So you *are* Jan Hunkum's daughter, you clever hussy. You own to it now that the right time's come. I don't know much about law, but a daughter of any kind must come off best on such occasions. Perhaps you'll have half! And now, Liza, mum's the word: you've not been inside the house. And we'll set the police to catch that murderous bully! You run across to the Kippels yonder, and I make myself scarce. Good-bye."

"But, Ferdy——"

He came back to her. "If the money's there," he said, "and the old man's really dead, why shouldn't we go in and take some now?"

She eyed him narrowly. "I'm yearning to marry you, Ferdy," she answered. "I'd do anything for it. But I won't—no, I won't—steal."

"What a fuss you make," he said. "Well, it's easier to get it regular."

## VI

AN hour later the Hemel was ringing with the news.

Against yesterday's disappointment stood out lurid the reality of to-day. Jan Hunkum was really murdered. He would not come back to say he was not. The constable from Horstwyk, forcing the door against which the bread-girl had vainly beaten, had found the miser prostrate among his treasures, killed by a blow from a bar which still lay by his side. It appeared that the lamp had been overturned in the struggle. Panic-stricken, probably, the murderer had fled, leaving

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most of the booty behind him. The money was there.

The money was there. Horrible details of the tragedy leaked out. The money was there. In each family circle the Hemelers softly computed impossible legacies, but the incidents of the crime were the public delight of the hour.

In the course of that Sunday afternoon Barend Everts was arrested at the house where he lodged. There was absolutely no evidence against him, no ground for suspicion, except that Jaap Avis had seen him creep home in the early morning, without a coat on, and covered with dirt. But the police locked him up. Monday's newspapers all called him "the murderer," and the public conscience was appeased. Confronted with the examining magistrate, he refused to answer any questions. "I am a fool," he said. "Everyone knows I am a fool. Whatever I replied would be sure to do me harm." He remained obstinately silent. The authorities, accustomed to extorting confessions, were nonplussed.

While the slow investigation, with its futile interrogatories and blind quest of the missing jacket, dragged wearily nowhere, the body of Jan Hunkum was laid solemnly to rest, amid the hysteric lamentations of the Hemel. And immediately afterwards the contents of the will became known. Liza Brock was sole heiress. In her default the money would go to the cousins, proportionately, as the barber had told them—to the whole of the hamlet, in fact. The proviso about never having entered the cottage was written down also, and, whether expressly or through some inadvertence, it included Liza among the rest. Perhaps the recollection of this had tortured Hunkum's dying moments? No one



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will ever know. The conditions of the document must have been fresh in his mind. It had been drawn up a few hours before his death.

The whole hamlet sank away from Liza in one groan of admiration and scorn. She was an heiress indeed, and heiress of gold and of shame, said the Hemelers. From the miser's careful account-books it was proved that nearly one-half of his fortune had perished in the flames; some forty thousand guilders remained. The children, playing in the streets, stopped to call out, "Liza Hunkum!" their grinning elders casually reminded the girl how each successive speaker had "always stood her (solitary) friend." The morose pointed out that the money was still in the hands of the lawyers. "I wish it would remain there!" the heiress had foolishly exclaimed. A shower of opprobrious epithets fell behind her stiffening back.

As for Liza herself, she would gladly have hidden all day in her garret. She hated Jan Hunkum for the shame he had brought upon her. She despised, with a dogged affection, the mother who had sought, and now shared, her disgrace. The thought of the money was abhorrent to her: she scorned herself for desiring it still. The wretched jacket, that every one was writing and talking about, she had buried near the pig-stye. Sometimes she hoped they would find it. But nobody dreamed of her as a possible accessory. She had knocked at the murdered man's door, and, receiving no answer, had run to a neighbour's and given the alarm.

Fistycuffs was formally engaged to the heiress. They were to be married as soon as this business was settled. "Not a moment too soon," said the gossips. But that, in a place like the Hemel, was captiousness. It was

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envy and malice and much uncharitableness. For nobody, in the Hemel, married "too soon."

Fistycuffs showed himself frankly happy and good-natured. Everybody said he was not half a bad fellow. So they treated him—for he treated them—well.

"I shan't say a word about having seen Everts," he confided to Liza. "People might ask of us what we were doing there, don't you see? Best keep away from the police if you can. Besides, 'pon my honour, I wouldn't do any man a useless bad turn. Not even Everts. I'm not such a cad as to help the police."

The matter was indeed a point of honour with the speaker, perhaps the only point of honour he had. A point which would vanish as soon as convenient.

Liza had now one supreme preoccupation, and that was to get married "in time." But herein she unexpectedly found herself hindered by her mother. Mary Brock had wept stormy tears over her daughter's unspoken reproaches, over Jan Hunkum's horrible end, over Barend's misfortune. She loudly proclaimed her belief in the latter's innocence. He was too good, she declared, for the likes of her daughter, just as he had been too good for herself. And she stood up, facing Fistycuffs and Liza.

"As long as it's not settled what happens to Barend," she said, "there'll be no marryings nor merry-makings *here!*" And she brought down her fist with a sympathetic crash on the tottery table in front of her.

"You be blowed!" said Fistycuffs, and pulled at his pipe. "Barend Everts is safe enough. The police haven't got any evidence. They'll have to let him go."

"Are you sure?" asked Liza, looking up quickly

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from a tiny something she was clumsily endeavouring to sew.

"Sure. They can't convict a man of murder for coming home without his coat. I don't understand about that business. If they had found the coat—as they should have done—at Jan Hunkum's—whew!" He ended in an expressive whistle. Liza bent over her needlework.

"But why don't he speak?" Fistycuffs resumed. "Where is the coat? That's what all the papers are asking, and he as mute as that table that Mary's gone and cracked."

"It ain't your table," retorted Mary fiercely. Nevertheless she looked with some interest for corroboration of the charge. "Barend's as innocent," she added, "as innocent as—me." She turned on her daughter. "What d'ye mean?" she cried, in a fury.

"I? Nothing," replied Liza with genuine amazement. "I said nothing."

"Ah, but you meant the more, you limb. Barend's as innocent of murder as an unborn baby. If he won't speak, it's because there's some woman in the business. He never was near Hunkum's cottage, you bet! He's shielding some woman."

The three looked at each other, uneasy, each with half a secret to hide.

"I know Barend," concluded Mary, shaking her head. "He's as much of a gentleman as the Baron."

"I don't believe it," said Liza.

"Believe what yer like. Yer don't believe in yer own mother. D'yer think 'cause he wouldn't have *you*, that he wouldn't have nobody?"

"Oh, shut up, the pair of you!" shouted Fistycuffs,

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kicking out his legs under the table. "He's done it, sure enough, and mighty cunning too! First he smashes the poor old fellow's head with the bar he brought in for the purpose, then he upsets the petroleum lamp, so people should think it was an accident. In course he hoped the whole cottage'd burn! And he made off with all he could grab in his hurry. I don't doubt we shall get back what he stole, but what he burnt's burnt, and I wish he was——"

"Yes, yes, we've heard all that before," interrupted Liza, nervously striking her foot on the floor.

"You hold your jaw and let me speak! Don't you see, Mary? All the papers are saying the same. 'Tis as clear as ditch-water. But none of it can be brought home to him, and they'll have to let him off."

"And he'll dance at your wedding," said Mary Brock.

"What? The man that murdered Liza's father? For shame on you! Besides, we shall be married long before they let him out."

"Not till he's out o' prison. You won't be married till he's out o' prison," said Mary Brock.

"What the devil do you mean?" said Fistycuffs, sitting up and curiously eyeing his prospective mother-in-law.

"What I say: I always do. You don't: Liza's under age, and I'm her mother. And I know what's respectable, though Liza thinks I doesn't. There'll be no feastings in *this* family, Ferdinand, till the murder business is over, say I!"

"Say it again, and I'll black your eyes for you!"

"Till this murder business is over——" Liza started to her feet.

"Go now, Ferdinand; it's late," she said.

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"Very well," answered Fistycuffs sullenly. "But, mind yer, we marry next month or not at all!" he blustered out. The two women stood watching each other.

"Mother, he is right," said Liza softly. "We must marry next month."

Mary Brock sat down on the shaky table. "The law's on my side," she said, folding her arms.

"But unless they get more evidence, the case may drag on for months. Don't you want us, mother, to be married at all?"

"Ah, my lady, you're mighty soft-spoken to your disreputable mother—all of a sudden! You won't be married till this murder business is over! Fool, 'twill always be soon enough to find yourself chained to Fistycuffs!"

Liza Brock gazed at her mother's set jaws and hot eyes. Formalities are numerous in Holland: clandestine marriages impossible.

"You can't be married without I give you leave," cried Mary overbearingly. "You can't! You can't!"

"I know," replied Liza. Her voice was so gentle, Mary stared in astonishment.

"I'm your mother," continued Mary, nettled. "You can't help that."

Liza Brock stepped back. "No, I can't," she said. "Nor could you! Nor could you!"

She lashed the other woman's coarse soul with the laugh in her scornful tones, but the next moment her face was grown sad again. "Perhaps I care about things you don't care about. Mother, I want to be married—soon! I want to be!" There were tears in her rough voice. She threw forward her supple

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young body in the fervour of her appeal. "I want to be! I want to be!"

"Oh yes, you're a fine lady," said Mary, scratching her head. "And what's fine enough for your mother ain't half fine enough for you! I know. Your ideas of decency aren't mine, you say. They aren't. There was no need for hurry when I married—no need at all, and if I hadn't been left a poor lone widow, waiting for bread—but there, 'tis no use talking. There'll be no marrying here, and no giving in marriage, till this trial's over. I won't hear another word."

Liza quietly left the house, not even troubling to close the door. Mary called after her, hot words of abuse.

Although it was already past eleven, the girl walked straight to Joop Sloop's and knocked loudly.

"Walk in, mum," said Julia, with a mock curtsy, on the threshold. "The door didn't happen to be locked, mum. I didn't know in these parts as they ever was!"

"I didn't want to take you unawares," answered Liza. "Where's Fistycuffs?"

"Him!" said Julia, and dropped a rapid glance down her visitor. "Don't do unto others—I see! Mr. Fistycuffs, madam, is here."

"So I thought," replied Liza. Then she flushed with self-annoyance. "I mean," she added clumsily, "he said he'd look in here."

"Just so," remarked Julia.

"There's only two things I believe he really cares about. One's me and t'other's drink."

"Indeed?" replied Julia, smiling. "Now, I never give him drink, so he has to come to me for myself alone. You might try?"

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Liza clenched her fists. "Where's Fistycuffs?" she said, as if till now they had been talking of some one else. "I want to speak to him, not to you. Tell him to come to me instantly. Outside."

"Undoubtedly outside," retorted Julia. She went and fetched the bully out of the inner room. "You needn't hide," she said. "She knows you're here. Trust any woman to know. I knew when she was after Barend."

"That's a d——d lie," cried Fistycuffs. "Barend was after her, and you know it!"

"Swear at your wife, you brute!" replied Julia, thrusting him forward. "Do you think that I'd ever have looked at you, if it hadn't been to pay her out?"

"Don't, Julia. I'll be back in a minute. When I'm married, we needn't hide." He went out sullenly to Liza in the dark. "What do you want with me?" he said. Then he tried humour. "Haven't you had enough of me all this while? Didn't you tell me yourself to get out?"

"I meant you to go home," said Liza.

"So I shall when I've had my drink. I want it after talking myself hoarse over Barend. And, look here, I won't stand no nonsense——"

"Don't, Ferdy. Mother says she won't let us marry until the trial's over. I know mother. Nothing'll move her. Ferdy, we *can't* wait!" Her voice rang out in despair.

"Hold hard, can't ye? D'ye want Joop Sloop to hear? D'ye mean to say, Liza, that it's a really, truly, settled fact?"

"Yes."

"And Mary calls Barend a fool!" exclaimed Fisty-

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cuffs with huge contempt. "Why, a case like this—all suspicion and little evidence—drags on for months and months. All right. You go home and leave me to settle this little matter. I know how to manage it. You'll be married next month. Good-night." He turned, looked to right and left—all the yearning and hope of her heart swelled on high—and then he went back into the house.

"Why," he said to himself, "if we waited until she'd lost her chief reason for marrying me—hang it if I don't think she wouldn't have me at all!"

Next morning he solicited an interview of the examining magistrate and remained closeted with that important functionary for some considerable time.

## VII

FOR three months after the "murder" the newspapers consistently abused the police. They abused them for not having discovered anything, and also for not having communicated their discoveries to the Press. They abused them for not following up the clues vouchsafed by intelligent reporters, and still more for following them up when these clues came to nothing. The public agreed with the newspapers, and so did the police themselves.

In the midst of this customary muddle—and of the month of February—an announcement was sent round by the authorities that the case had been sent up for trial. The Public Prosecutor was in possession of all the necessary evidence; the accused would undoubtedly be condemned.

Whereupon the newspapers, which had recently



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commenced pitying "the person still under arrest," immediately returned to attacks on "the murderer." And readers all over the country dropped their interest in this unravelled detective story, and, calmly awaiting the day of the trial, turned to the fourteen "mysteries" still on their list.

Not so at the Hemel, however, where the excitement flared up and burned brighter than ever. Speculation—the only flame whose increase needs no fuel—filled the air. But it illumined emptiness. One woman, in the silence of her garret, of her trudges on the high road, kept asking: Had Barend confessed?

And for the hundredth time that woman turned upon herself. Why should Barend, the big, blue-eyed fool, who never needed money, why should Barend, of all the Hemelers, have sought to murder Hunkum? Only one explanation seemed possible: recollecting their conversation on the night of the catastrophe, she made a close guess at the facts. "It was I that sent him," she whispered, in the loneliness of the garret, of the high road. "He knew about the paper. He knew I wanted money. He wanted the money for me." She would have been far more wroth with her father's murderer had she not often accused herself of the crime.

Why, if he wanted the money, had he not taken it? The Hemel declared that he had. It felt confident that he had hidden underground the greater part of the miser's untold millions, cunningly leaving the "trifle" inherited by Liza. It was unanimous in declaring that the torture ought to be applied, to make him confess where the treasure lay hidden. And it also said that Liza had got more than she deserved, and that the Government ill-treated the prisoner.

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Meanwhile, the accused was removed to the chief town of his province, where the High Court of Justice would try his case. The day before the proceedings began, the penniless Hemel diligently counted up its pennies. It found it had not money enough for a trip to the city, but it bravely resolved to go all the same. It never has money for anything, and only spends what it hasn't got on pleasure—for what else, it says truly, is money for ? Loud envy ran riot around "the heiress," whose expenses were paid as a witness. "Filthy lucre," said Joop Sloop, "always falls in heaps."

"Are *you* going, Ferdy ?" asked Liza suddenly. For days she had delayed the question. It was now the night before the trial.

Fistycuffs grinned. "I wouldn't miss the winding-up," he answered ; "no, not for anything."

"Then you can go with me," said Mary Brock, "Liza being a witness."

He objected, stammering clumsily. "I can't have any one bothering. I'm going alone," he said.

"With Julia," remarked Liza imperturbably, turning her face to the mother. "Don't, mother ; let him go."

"'Tis a lie !" shouted Fistycuffs ; "a regular Liza-lie ! You've got such an infernal temper, Liza, hang me if I don't think I'm a fool for wanting to marry you at all !"

"Oh, you'll marry me," sneered Liza sadly ; "I shall always be worth your while."

He started up and came at her. Mary Brock flung an oath between them. "Don't, Ferdy," said the girl. "Don't worry me, then. I don't mind who you go with. I wish the whole horrible business was done." She shivered.

"Julia swears she ain't going at all," answered the

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bully, somewhat mollified. "Dang me if I don't sometimes think she was sweet on that poacher chap."

"She?" cried Liza, her pent-up scorn ablaze. "She's sweet on them all, bad and good."

"Well, if she is, she don't show it," retorted Fisty-cuffs, nettled. Liza bit her lips.

Immediately after, in the painful silence that followed, there came a loud knock at the door—such a knock as means a command. The next moment two buttoned-up officials seemed to fill the room with their presence.

"Liza Brock?" said one of these men. "Which is Liza Brock? Look here, you must come with us. No harm's intended. Put on your hat and come."

She sprang from her stool. "Have they found it?" she cried.

"Found what?" The detective, to whom every human being was, of course, an undetected criminal, eyed her sharply.

"Nothing."

"You just come at once," said the detective, less kindly than before.

"Gentlemen," spoke Mary Brock, with obsequious resentment, "you needn't have given the poor girl such a turn, which is dangerous, considering the circumstances. And if either of you knows by experience as a father——"

"Ain't that girl ready yet? Look sharp," said the inspector.

"I s'pose 'tis this same business about her evidence——"

"Come along," said the inspector, and bundled out Liza into the night. The pair of policemen took her between them, and stumbled through the darkness till they emerged upon the high road at some distance from

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the hamlet. Here a hired wagonette was in waiting. Liza recognized the bottle-nosed driver asleep on the step.

"Look sharp," said the inspector. That was his favourite phrase : he had risen in the force by repeating it. As the carriage rolled away, he flashed a dark lantern across his watch. "We shall just be in time," he said, "to catch the last train at Horstwyk Station."

So Liza knew she was being taken to the town. She resolved not to put any questions, pretending not to care.

Yet, in spite of all her assumed indifference, she could not keep her cheek from paling when, two hours later, she alighted under the dismal glare of a massive lantern over heavy gates. She knew that these dead walls enclosed a prison. It was here that Barend Everts sat awaiting his uncertain fate.

She shivered between locked doors in the chill of the whitewashed entry. But then she forced herself to remember that Barend was her father's murderer. "What, in the name of mercy, gentlemen, do you want with me?" These words were at her lips, but she did not utter them aloud. For two long hours she had been refusing to pronounce them.

Her conductors led her, through whitewashed passages, to a whitewashed parlour. Everything was whitewashed—doubtless an object lesson from the people outside to the people within. Liza remembered having heard somewhere—not in a church, for she never went there—the expression "a whited sepulchre," words whose meaning she had never understood. She wondered now whether they could have referred to the prison. She was so unaccustomed to cleanliness, it seemed a

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hateful thing. She drew her shawl around her as if to avoid it.

"Barend Everts, the murderer, wants to see you," began the inspector, suddenly dropping that mystification which, with all criminal investigation people, passes for cleverness. "He's broke silence to-night, and says he wants to see you. The trial's to-morrow. He'll confess, he says, to you."

She sank down on one of the rush-bottomed chairs, and repeated to herself that she was calm. Her tight-clutching fingers tore away the ragged fringe from the corners of her shawl.

A narrow door opened in the wall at the farther end. Two gentlemen entered, one old and one young. She noticed that the younger one carried a bundle of papers and wore a coloured cravat. Immediately after him came two warders, bringing the prisoner between them. In his prison dress the latter already looked two-thirds a convict. His heavy hands were superfluously manacled. His appearance was dejected and numb.

"Here, then, is the young person you were anxious to speak to," began the examining magistrate, as soon as he had seated himself at the table. After the noisy entry of cumbersome boots on the boarded floor an uncomfortable hush had fallen. Barend stood in the loud light, seemingly unconscious of his jailers.

But at the sound of his persecutor's voice he drew away his eyes from Liza's face.

"Go away, you all," he said in a low tone.

His gaze travelled stupidly round the half a dozen stolid men. One of the warders smiled.

"You forget to whom you are speaking!" exclaimed the magistrate, angrily rapping the table.

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"Whatever you may wish to say must be said in my presence. Surely you didn't expect a private interview with the principal witness?"

"Gentlemen," said the prisoner, "I want to speak to Liza."

The young clerk glanced up with a gleam of interest upon his good-natured face. He was a trifle too well dressed and too carefully groomed for the bareness and misery around.

"So you can—in my presence," repeated the magistrate testily. "Every word you that say will of course be taken down."

He played with his eyeglass. In all matters judicial he dreaded what he called "the personal note."

"Then I shan't confess a word," said Barend doggedly.

A long moment of silence ensued, so painful that Liza, irresistibly, coughed.

"I wanted to tell you, Liza, exactly how it happened," began Barend immediately. "I can't tell the Government; I'm too great a fool; they'd twist it all against me. I've thought it all out in prison. I've not been unhappy in prison. Government's better to poor people in prison than it is to poor people outside." He paused, as if ruminating this great truth. The clerk's pen scratched across the paper, "than it is to poor people outside."

"You needn't put in that bit," said the magistrate leaning over.

Barend suddenly veered round to the girl—so suddenly that the warders caught at him. He shook them off. "Listen well," he said, "remember it afterwards. I've thought it all out in prison. I've never been a good

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man, Liza. I've never pretended to be. I don't mean about the poaching. I can't fancy God Almighty thinks catching one hare in a hundred a very bad crime. Seems to me, before Government made the game laws, God Almighty had already given all the game away."

The young Nimrod at the table swept every vestige of sympathy from face and heart in one gigantic frown. "No, I don't mean the poaching, but all the same I'm not a good man. But it was all such a muddle at first, that I couldn't make out for the life of me if I'd done it or not. But I wondered if God Almighty would tell me—*He* must know, I suppose, although nobody else does—and one night I asked Him, and——" He turned on the hearkening group all round him: "Damn you all!" he burst out. "How can I tell her how God Almighty helped me, with all you standing by?" The magistrate, three fingers thrown up in alarm, made as if he would have repressed such language, but refrained. The criminal again turned away; his tone had so completely changed, it sounded almost jocular. "Look here, Liza," he said, "it's all nonsense, you know. I never murdered Hunkum. They say they've got plenty of evidence. How *can* they have plenty of evidence of what I never did? They only say it to frighten me. When I found you——" The gentlemen at the table exchanged glances. Liza caught the movement and lifted a warning hand.

"There, you see!" cried the prisoner, his face instantly gone white. "They'd twist everything against me. I won't say another word. But mark you this, Liza, whatever they may prove or witness at the trial to-morrow, I never hurt your father. Remember that, won't you? That's all." He made a

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clumsy bow to the magistrate and slouched towards the door. Halfway he halted and came back.

"It can't be helped, then," he said in a stifled voice. "You must just make believe there's no one listening. I love you, Liza. I've always loved you. I've never loved—not *loved*—anybody else. It's worth being dragged here in this way—isn't it?—to hear any man say that. Good-night." He stood still. She went forward to him; twisting his hand round as best she could, in the manacles, she clasped it with steadfast face.

"Remove the prisoner," said the old magistrate mildly. He rose, and the young man with him. The latter beckoned the inspector. "Find that girl some decent lodging for the night," he said. "Look after her." The police officer saluted, and, when the gentlemen were gone, tore a leaf from his pocket-book.

"There!" he said, hastily writing down an address, "you'll be all right there. It's my belief you're just an accomplice. Past midnight! I can't be bothered. Look sharp!"

## VIII

IN the great court the great trial was on. In the great court, with its long-drawn hush, its stifled crowd, its continuous murmur at the farther end. The Hemelers, all personally interested, had pushed to the front, their uncleanness affording them a pass. Most of them now hung over the barrier triumphant, and nodded to the witnesses down below, in proof that they also were connected with the affair.



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Liza, looking straight ahead, as she passed through the special entrance, had been astonished to see Fistycuffs already ensconced in the corner allotted to witnesses. He was laughing and nodding to some one in the gallery: Liza, following his gaze, caught Julia's insolent response. The next moment Fistycuffs sat awkwardly studying his boots. He had no wish to offend the heiress before she became his wife.

"Ferdie a witness?" questioned Liza. Why had he not told her? And why had he never been present at any of the preliminary proceedings? Her heart misgave her. He had seen Barend leave the cottage. That was all, but it was a great deal; perhaps it would prove enough. He had always said the police must help themselves. Pals or police? No man of honour would help the police.

Oh, what did the whole wretched business matter to her? Again and again she had reiterated that question through the long night watch in her luxurious lodging-house bed. Again and again she had told herself—nothing. And the question had risen, unanswered, across the reply.

She would give her insignificant evidence. She had found the house unopened, that was all. That would inculcate nobody. *Now* Fistycuffs would add that he had seen Barend leave the cottage. Well, that was true; could she help it? Surely it would not be sufficient to convict any one of murder. And if the Government thought that it was, the law must take its course. What could she, a wretched girl from the Hemel, understand about Government?

Whatever might have been her doubts or hesitations before, since last night she knew Barend was innocent.

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He had told her. And, until she saw Fistycuffs mysteriously included among the witnesses, she had never seriously believed but that the prosecution would fail. Every one had said it must fail for want of evidence. In legal investigation, as she knew, guilt or innocence does not seriously matter, but proof.

Barend, then, would be liberated, and she would marry Fistycuffs. She would have plenty of money to make Fistycuffs happy with, and her shame would be taken away. Never would child of hers rise up against her, as she rose against Mary Brock! Fistycuffs, if only he had money, was good-natured and kind. Everybody said so. She would be happy with Fistycuffs.

The Public Prosecutor was reading his Act of Accusation, as they call it. It seemed very lengthy and very strongly worded. To hear him, you would fancy the proofs were overwhelming. She strained to understand what he was saying, before he should be saying something else. A witness, he declared, would be forthcoming who could testify to the actual commission of the crime. A thrill of astonishment ran through the audience. She did not remark it: for her a handful of personages filled the vast building: the prisoner, Fistycuffs, the judges—perhaps Julia—and herself.

The first witness of interest was Jaap Avis. The Hemel, bored by technicalities, expected a little diversion from him, but not much excitement from any one. There *were* no witnesses: that was the misfortune.

Jaap Avis, intuitively prying, had seen Barend slink home at daybreak in sorry plight. It was Providence, said Jaap Avis, which had caused him, at the right moment, to draw back his window-blind.

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For the first, and last, time during the proceedings the prisoner smiled. He knew that Providence was Jaap Avis' drunken neighbour's dirt-sodden "wife"—the widow with the black ringlets and pleading eyes, his own—the prisoner's—quondam landlady.

"You were up early," said the presiding judge to the witness.

"Yes, my lord judge," smirked Jaap Avis, "and the last to go home the night before."

"Drunk," said the prisoner's counsel.

But the presiding judge ruled this question irrelevant, unless counsel desired to argue that witness was still drunk in the morning. The advocate hastened to deprecate any such intention. His had merely been an involuntary annotation; without any hint of inquiry in it. He did not doubt for a moment that six hours would suffice to render any Hemeler sober—as sober as a judge. The Hemelers grinned at each other, gratified, in perfect good faith, by the compliment. The lawyer was a teetotaler, inclined to grow rabid. All gin's sin: all sin's gin. That was his theory.

It was proved, then, that Barend had come home without his jacket. Not much more was proved. His counsel eagerly pointed out that the jacket had not been found in Hunkum's cottage, that its absence therefore disculpated his client: the man had been poaching—

"Yes, yes," said the President testily. "Quite true. If the prisoner would but say where the jacket was lost——" But the prisoner would say nothing, correctly surmising that, among lawyers, only the guilty may possibly find benefit in speech. The disconcerted judges declared his attitude indecent. The advocate,

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despairing, clenched both fists underneath his desk. The general conviction deepened that the prisoner was guilty, but would get off.

It was then that the Public Prosecutor called for Ferdinand. He stepped forward brightly, but he didn't look at Liza. A smile of prospective triumph lit the Prosecutor's yellow face. Liza clutched at the rail in front of her. Supposing Fisty had found the jacket? Why had she gone so often, at midnight, to make sure it was still there? Why had she gone last night again? Supposing her lover betrayed the man who loved her? The tears stood in her eyes.

The next moment she steadied herself. After all, she couldn't help it. She must speak the truth. So, of course, must Fistycuffs. And the law must take its course.

"I followed the prisoner," Fistycuffs said smoothly. His clear accents filled the silent hall. "It was close upon twelve o'clock: I wondered where he was going. I thought he was after Jan Hunkum's chickens. Jan Hunkum had no chickens. I saw him go round the house to the little window at the back."

"Was it a moonlit night?" inquired the President.

"N—n—no," replied Fistycuffs, "it was not a moonlit night. I was quite close to him. And he wrenched away the iron bars from the window, and so he got in."

"Could you wrench away iron bars like that?" asked the President.

"Yes," said Fistycuffs. Barend Everts looked towards him, quietly. The Hemelers nudged each other, their wide mouths stretching from ear to ear.

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"I crept round to the bedroom window," continued the witness. "There was a chink in the shutter and I looked through. Jan Hunkum was sitting in bed, with his money heaped up around him, heaps of money, all around him, heaps of banknotes and silver and gold!"

"Not silver," interposed the Public Prosecutor softly.

"I fancied there was silver as well," replied Fistycuffs, half apologetic, half reproachful. "Poor men like me can't distinguish properly when they see a lot of treasure heaped up like that."

"And, besides, the chink was narrow," said the Prosecutor, turning to the judges.

"And, besides, the chink was extraordinary narrow. Barend Everts went straight up to the bed, with one of the window bars in his hand, and he struck Jan Hunkum down with it among the bedclothes, dead."

"How did you know he was dead?" asked the President.

"He looked dead, Mynheer the President. Barend Everts dragged down the body and threw it on the floor. Then he filled his pockets with gold and banknotes, stuffing them in anyhow as fast as he could. And then he upset the burning petroleum lamp among the rest of the papers, and then he ran away."

Fistycuffs stopped speaking, and now looked across at Liza, magnificently: his task was accomplished, his success assured. A long thrill of delighted horror pervaded his audience, which had never doubted the immensity of Barend's secreted spoil. But some of the bolder spirits amongst the Hemelers stared curiously. They had often felt interested in Jan Hunkum's shutters. They had never found chinks.

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"The pockets of his jacket?" inconsistently questioned the President.

"Which hide the treasure they are hidden with to this day," suggested the Prosecutor.

"I don't know," said the witness, for the President awaited an answer. He added: "The chink was extraordinary narrow."

"Mr. President," said the prisoner's advocate, "that chink seems to have expanded and contracted at will," The President frowned. He was delighted with this unexpected assistance. Of course, as they all knew, the prisoner was guilty. They would be able to prove him so now.

But the President was a moral man. He liked to point a moral, just as Fistycuffs ilked to adorn a tale.

"Did it not occur to you, witness," he began, "when you saw the prisoner enter the house, that you might, by immediately following him, avert an impending catastrophe?"

"Do what, your worship?" asked Fistycuffs, to gain time.

"Might prevent the old man's being killed!" explained the President angrily.

Fistycuffs opened his eyes. He wanted to marry Liza without more delay. He was not in the world to avert catastrophes.

"No," he said, "it didn't occur to me. I didn't know there was going to be murder. And, besides, is your worship aware that, if I had entered Jan Hunkum's house, I should never have been able to inherit a penny of Jan Hunkum's gold?"

"You are almost an accomplice," said the President,

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very red in the face. "The moral standard of the lower classes in this country is deplorable. It is incomprehensible, when all the non-Christian virtues are daily taught in the undenominational schools. This man's evidence is of the greatest importance. You can step down."

The Public Prosecutor popped up. "We have now to hear the statement," he said, "of the girl who warned the constables, whereupon these latter found the victim lying exactly as the last witness has described. That, with some minor, technical, evidence, will complete the case."

"Speak up," said the President to Liza, before she had spoken a word.

She turned when she stood in open court, desirous only not to see Fistycuffs.

"Look this way," said the President. An usher pushed her. She gazed up at the lofty tribunal, the robed judges, the big inkstands, the majesty of the law.

"Please, I must stand like this," she said in tones thick like a swollen torrent. "It's all lies what the last witness has been saying. It's lies, my lords, lies! I can prove it. Let me speak, like this! Leave me alone, you man! I can prove it. It is lies, lies, lies!" No one had stopped her. They fell back in amazement. The Hemelers, who considered the heiress their own especial, important property, had concentrated much of their attention upon her from the first. The whole crowded concourse, however, now suddenly realizing that this was the heroine of the tragical story, the murdered man's daughter, the last witness's sweetheart, the ragged inheritress of

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fabulous wealth—the whole concourse rose, struggling, to stare at her, to see her, enjoy and understand her, to get an impression, a sensation, something engrossing that you can carry away. There was a flutter, and the continuous "Hush, hush!" of increasing excitement. Her rapid words came tumbling, as waves before the wind.

"It is lies," she repeated. "I can prove it. He cannot have been near Jan Hunkum's cottage. He cannot have seen what he says he saw. It isn't true, and if it had been true he couldn't have seen it."

"Why not, pray?" asked the judge.

"Because it's lies. All lies." The Prosecutor smiled again. "You will have to prove what you say. You are engaged to the last witness, are you not?"

"Yes."

"You give your lover a very bad character. What is your reason for affirming that he has not spoken the truth?"

"I would rather not say. But it's all lies."

Despite the general tension a ripple of laughter passed over the public. The professionals steadied their faces to a sneer.

"You will *have* to say. To say everything. To prove, instantly, your charge."

"I can prove it."

"How?" the President barked.

"Because he was with me." She spoke the words quite softly: everybody heard them at the back of the gallery.

There was a silence. Presently the Public Prosecutor said—"We know he was. That is to say, he had been. It was coming away from the witness which made him



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so late. They had enjoyed each other's company till very near midnight, Mynheer the President. That is no business of mine."

"The morals of the rural population!" said the President, and he threw up both hands. By the way, he owned a wife for each.

"I can't help it, Ferdy!" exclaimed Liza desperately, still staring away over the heads of the judges. "I *must* tell them! You know you were in the pig-stye! You know I had locked you up in the pig-stye! Your worships, I had locked him up in the pig-stye, because—because I wanted to! He stayed there all night, your worships. He couldn't have seen anything happen anywhere, my lords!"

"You seem to do most things because you want to," said the President. "Are you in a hurry to be married because you want to, or because you must?" He leered at her: the Public Prosecutor bit his nails.

"Because I must," she answered fearlessly. She threw back her head, facing them all, in her rage. "And I want to as well," she added. "But it's lies about Hunkum's falling dead! Fistycuffs—Ferdinand says he saw Hunkum fall dead under a blow from Barend. I love him—yes, gentlemen, I love him!"—she shrieked out the words—"I'm going to marry him as you say, but he musn't say it, gentlemen, he mayn't say it! I know it isn't true, for why?—when——"

She stopped suddenly. She perfectly realized what was coming. She knew what she was going to do.

"When?" said the President, bending across the table. His fat hands, from the distance, seemed to be fumbling at her breast.

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She hesitated. Why, after all, should she do it ?

"When I reached Jan Hunkum's house in the early morning," she struggled on, "I heard a sound inside of some one moaning, and I crept through the little window and got inside."

A loud oath sprang from Fistycuff's throat like a pistol-shot. The Hemelers surged forward, their faces aflame, rapacious, exultant, exuberant.

"Silence!" cried the President, in a fury. And now Liza turned round, looking straight at her lover, and speaking very fast.

"Jan Hunkum was still alive," she said. "He couldn't speak to me. But the iron bar was in *his* hand, clutched tight, and he lay beside the money-chest, and he'd struck his head on the edge, I suppose, but the bar was in *his* hand, my lord!"

The prisoner had sunk his face on his hands, hiding it completely.

"And that is all I have to say, my lord. It's the truth, the Gospel truth, and not a word's been added. I couldn't help it, Ferdy. I should never have spoke if you hadn't forced me to by——"

"Silence!" cried the President again. "Do you know, my girl, that you charge your lover with perjury? Perjury—that's swearing false. Either he or you swear false. He will go to prison on a charge of perjury."

Liza stretched out both hands to Fistycuffs. The look in his eyes met hers. "Don't, Ferdy!" she cried, and fell in a heap on the floor of the court.

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### IX

IN the darkened garret—it was dark enough, at best—she lay stretched on her bed. The surroundings were far from beautiful, but there was a white look on her dusky face which somehow partly beautified them. She opened her eyes.

“I want to see the child,” she said wearily.

“The child’s dead,” replied Mary, in a loud voice. Presently she sniffed, but rather in defiance of some unknown fate than in sorrow.

Liza closed her eyes again, and the lashes slowly moistened. It was some time before she said—“All right.”

Again there was a long pause. Then Mary remarked—“You can see it all the same,” and she got up and brought the little bundle across.

“I should be glad it was dead,” said Liza, gazing steadily, “if I was dead too, and—and Ferdinand. I wish Ferdinand was dead too, and me.”

“What!” exclaimed Mary. “You don’t mean to say you still care for that scoundrel Fistycuffs? You haven’t mentioned his name, Liza, since you left off being delirious. Not that you’ve said much since then. But to care for a scoundrel like Fistycuffs! I’m glad the babe’s dead, for it might have been like him.”

“Hush, mother! Yes, you’re right,” murmured Liza. “Yes, it’s best about the baby. I—I don’t want, I’m sure, to speak about Ferdinand. I don’t want never to mention his name again. He’s dead to

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me. But I wish we was both under the black earth, mother, and nobody to speak of the shame."

"Ferdinand's in prison," retorted Mary.

It was what Liza had dreaded throughout the gloomy days, yet the fact came home to her with a shock. She burst into a crying fit.

"Don't be a fool!" objected Mary. "Where else should he be, if you please, with judges in the land? They ought to hang him. The scoundrel!"

"Don't, mother," sobbed the girl. "I don't care about Ferdinand. I don't never want to hear his name again. But I don't want you, neither, to speak like that. If he's in prison, it's my doing. Will they—will they punish him bad?"

"Indeed they will," replied Mary, with conviction. "It's swearing lies, and that's a crime against the Queen. Not like swearing ordinary, or telling common lies, which ain't crimes at all, Joop says. They'll make it penal servitude. And serve him right."

"The lamp smells so," said Liza wearily. "I do wish it wouldn't smell. It makes my head so bad."

"Well, you've grown mighty finical to mind the smell of a lamp," replied her mother. "You'll be better soon now, Liza: Aunt Judith says so, and she came and 'read the words' over you again last night. She's been wonderful good about 'exercising' you. And when you're a wee bit stronger, you won't mind no smells of lamps."

"But I wish you'd open the window now," said Liza. Her mother obeyed, grumbling. As the sash went up—it was a sort of skylight—there came through the mirky air, faintly across the distance, a sound of uproarious singing, of drunken revelry.

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"*That's* your doing," said Mary moodily. "Not Fistycuff's being in prison, which is his very own. But *that's* your doing, more fool you!"

"What's my doing?" asked Liza, turning her head on the pillow.

"Why, all that noise there! The singing and goings on at Joop's, and half a dozen other places! I'ts been so night after night, ever since they come back from the trial, and that is a week ago to-day. They're spending the money that's going to come to 'em—thanks to you, that squandered your rightful property amongst a lot of ne'er-do-wells. Not a house in the Hemel, they do say, excepting ours, but gets its hundreds or thousands, Liza—Brock!"

"You'll get your share," murmured Liza. "Please mother, I couldn't help it. I wish you'd let me go to sleep."

With a grunt Mary retreated to the lamp. She sat down helplessly, a bit of towelling between her dirty fingers. It was just a week to-day since Liza, on the night of her return from the trial, had given untimely birth to a puling babe. The babe had stopped puling yesterday. The bit of towelling lay on Mary's lap, the needle sticking in its third uneven hem.

To-day, according to Dutch legal usage, the verdict had been pronounced in the city, and, doubtless, Barend had been released. Every one said he must be released—for want of evidence. As for the unsolved mystery, the triangular psychological puzzle, those now interested professionals only. Fistycuffs, hopelessly ruined, had confessed, with abundance of tears. People wanted Barend to get off. The Hemelers, prospectively

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wealthy, were not inclined to be hard on the author of their good fortune.

Mary Brock had fallen crushed beneath the crash of all her splendid aspirations. At first she could only sit and moan. Then, at last, she got up—because she had to—and nursed both child and grandchild, in very clumsy manner, nursed them and cursed them and cried over them alternately—or even simultaneously, when her feelings got too much for her under the deep depression of Liza Hunkum's—Hunkum's, mind you!—self-defeat.

She sighed again. She felt she was a wicked woman : the music maddened her. She rejoiced at any relief. The door creaked open, and Barend Everts stood before her.

He seemed to fill the attic. She thought he looked all the better for his long seclusion. There had been some strange rumour, lately, of money having come to him. But that was doubtless false.

He came right into the middle of the room, stopped a moment to gaze down on the dead baby, looked across to Mary, seemed about to say something, and then checking himself, in the hush, turned to the dark corner, to the bed.

He kneeled beside it. "Liza," he said, "I want to speak to you. I want to say something. May I?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him.

"I'm going to America," he hurried on. "I've got some money, Liza. 'Tis the final payment on my mother's legacy—her aunt's, you remember—it's come whilst I was in prison—five thousand guilders—a trifle over. I'm going to America to try and farm. I want you to come with me, Liza."

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"How could I?" she said softly. "I don't deserve to, Barend. Oh, Barend, you mustn't take me. Oh, no, no, no."

"Liza, have you got my jacket? Did you hide it? Have you got it still?"

She nodded.

"Liza, won't you marry me?"

"No, no, no," she said almost inaudibly, unwillingly, ever fainter.

He bent so close, he kissed her before and between the words.

## The Fair-Lover

### I

**A**NNEKE PETERS stood before the cottage door. She had finished the drudgery of the day for the day. To-morrow morning she would begin the whole thing over again, as she had begun it yesterday, patiently. Anneke Peters was a good girl. She knew it. That was the one bright spot in her life of monotonous doing-your-best.

For seven years, ever since her father died, she had lived with her widowed uncle, old Pete Peters ; Pete the miser, as the village called him, " Mammie's Grave Pete." Her own mother she could not remember : her father, she remembered, drank. She was fourteen when she came to keep house for Uncle Pete ; she had never done anything else, excepting, before that, keep house for her father. The latter had frequently abused, and occasionally fondled her : Uncle Pete had never done either, but he grumbled from morning till night. He was a respectable man in his way : born amongst a pauper set, he had worked himself up a few steps in the world, as a pedlar, by sheer industry and lies. He had a talent for commercial mendacity, the lie that pays ; he was the cleverest liar for miles around. He would swear himself black in the face, while describing his



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goods, "by the grave of his sister"; his excuse to himself, and to God, being this, that he never had had any sister to swear by. But when he substituted "mother's" for "sister's" he could always be relied on. Those who had frequent doings with him found him out, and that is how he got his nickname. In middle life he had married, and soon after lost, a childless widow with a competency. He then gave up his little business, and henceforward did nothing, living poorly, and lying for diversion, as he had formerly lied for gain. His other amusement was grumbling. He grumbled at everything and everybody, the Government, the weather, and Anneke, from morning till night. And he told stories all over the village, inventing complications, embroiling neighbours, keeping up a sort of perpetual April fooling and finding it excellent sport.

Anneke worked from morning till night to make all things go so well there should be no cause for grumbling, but that undertaking is hopeless where the grumbler needs no cause. She was very ignorant, she could barely read and write, but she had a natural liking for refinement of the outer kind—for pretty things and pleasantness; she put a couple of geraniums upon the window-sill, though "Mammie's Grave Pete" complained they kept you from seeing the girls go by.

"Boys go by," he corrected himself, with a leer. "They don't stop to look in, Anneke—much less, cross the threshold." He had few jokes, but frequent. "There's none come to fetch you for the Kermesse," he said. He said it over and over again.

He had grumbled over it on this summer evening, complaining that no man would ever come to take her off his hands. Here was Truda engaged to the hand-

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somest ne'er-do-well that had ever left black children behind him in India, and nobody to give Anneke as much as a look, unless it be the blind beggar, Jan Siemen.

Anneke had not replied that she saved her uncle a servant, nor had she pointed out that Jan Siemen never came near their uncharitable door. She had simply gone and stood outside in the early summer twilight, and thought how beautifully clear and still the sky was in the soft blue evening shades.

Yes, Truda was engaged. To handsome Harmen Reys, the Indian corporal. Truda, the child of Aunt Peters' prosperous sister, the wealthy innkeeper's only daughter, whose father jingled his keys and talked of his "iron safe"; Truda, who wore clothes to church on Sunday such as no other girl could have got at honestly. Truda Batsy had always scorned her low-born uncle's lower niece. She had been taught to do so, and had gladly learnt the lesson. "We must be decent to 'Mammie's Grave,'" said Juffrouw Batsy. "It'll be all the better when he steps into his own."

"Then I wish to God he would," said the innkeeper.

"But, as for Anneke Peters, she's of no account at all," said Juffrouw Batsy. She had slapped Truda as a child for asking if Anneke was a cousin of theirs.

And now Truda was engaged, and more aggressively scornful than ever. For years, from the days of their meeting at the infant school, the bigger girl, two years younger, but florid and healthy, had pinched, bullied, insulted the weakling creature with the plaintive eyes. Many and many a time she had giped at her in the streets. Now she was triumphant, and, indeed, why should it not be so? She had always triumphed from the first.

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All success and comfort and delight had always been hers. She even drove in her father's chaise on week-days.

As for being engaged—that is, formally engaged to be *married*—such grandeur unachievable formed no part of Anneke Peters' wildest dreams. But certainly she would have felt pleased had she received those more casual attentions which fall to the lot of most country girls. Nobody ever offered to keep company with Anneke; nobody suggested a walk, or stopped for a chat by her window. She was plain; she was poor; she was modest; people did not even feel absolutely sure that her father and mother had "been to the mayor's." Luckily for her, the chief proof on her behalf was furnished by Pete's persistent denial of the fact.

Yes, she would have liked a sweetheart—especially a Kermesse sweetheart—once in a way; a young man who would have taken her, as all the other girls got taken, sooner or later, to the annual fair at Overstad. That fair was the event of the year to all the peasants for miles around. The fair at Overstad, the splendid, riotous, ruinous fair; everybody went there in couples; it was a monstrosity to remain away. She only wanted to go one year. She only wanted to see, to have seen, to be able to talk about the thing with the others, who talked of it all through the year. Her uncle, unwilling to accompany her, had always refused to let her go unattended. "If you want to see it," he said, "get a lover—like the other girls. Ha!"

As she stood before the cottage door, this summer evening, Truda Batsy came by on her way to her own home, the tavern two hundred yards off. Harmen Reys

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was with her, looking bored. Perhaps the two had been quarrelling? Anneke's good little human heart gave a little leap of pleasure, instantly checked.

"Well?" said Truda, stopping short. She was vexed with her ne'er-do-well lover, and her heart was full of spite. "Anneke, are you going to the fair this year? They say it's quite unusually fine."

"Perhaps," replied Anneke boldly.

"Really? And whom are you going with?"

"Wouldn't you just like to know?"

"I shouldn't. I don't care tuppence who goes with whom, as long as I go with Harmen. But you'll want a sweetheart, Anneke, unless you take your Uncle Pete."

"Good-night, Truda," said Anneke, turning away.

"Or you might take Beggar Siemen. Anneke, if I were you, I'd rather *hire* a sweetheart than never go at all!" She passed on with a laugh, her lover trailing in her wake. Anneke stood looking after her.

"What a brute you are!" said Harmen, and twirled his light moustache.

Truda Batsy laughed again. "Why shouldn't she go with a hired lover?" said Truda. "Better people 'n she have done it a hundred times. But Uncle Pete'd never give her the money: that's why."

"You're a brute," replied Harmen, still more sulkily.

"It'd almost be better to go with a meek little brown-eyed thing like that than with such a vixen as you."

"Smooth words, please," said the girl, angrily.

"Why don't you go with her yourself, then? Don't overcharge, she ain't got much. None but the lowest of the low let themselves out at the fair."

"You're a brute," he said again. He was a man of few ideas.

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She turned round suddenly and struck him a sounding slap on the cheek.

The quondam corporal straightened himself ; a pink flush spread round the red mark on his fair skin. " I never strike a woman," he said, and, saluting, left her.

Anneke had gone back into the house. She walked slowly, meditating. She did not hate the innkeeper's daughter, for she could not honestly have wished her ill, but if there was any one on earth she loathed and dreaded, that person was Truda Batsy.

" Truda, eh ?—with her lover ? " said old Pete. " I thought so, but I couldn't make sure because of your damned geraniums." She went to mix her uncle his evening glass of brandy and water—cold from June to September, hot from September to June : she had done that nightly now for half a dozen years. He always grumbled over the mixture, yet once, on the single occasion when she had spent a few days in bed, he had told her, grumbling, that no one could prepare it as well as she.

" What a good-looking man he is," pursued old Pete. " No wonder that, out in the Indies, he could bring down sweethearts like cocoa-nuts ! "

" Was he very bad ? " asked Anneke, with an innocent thrill.

" Bad ? What a fool-girl's question ! Is it bad when you potter about your stupid bit of a garden, if you smell at the stocks and wallflowers and things ? What are they for else ? Though, depend upon it, *he* didn't smell at wallflowers. You're a wallflower, Anneke."

She made no reply, but helped him to bed. He was an unpleasant old man, and this part of her daily task

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was especially distasteful to her. She went up to her own little white attic—every year she did the white-washing herself—and lingeringly undressed. “What folly!” she said at last, endeavouring to cast off the thought which returned in the night and next morning. After all, the folly was possible. Other girls had committed it.

In the afternoon, when she ran out with a big tub of washing-water to the reedy canal that creeps along by the village, she saw Truda sitting idle, with a couple of others, under the big chestnut in front of the inn. They were laughing heartily. The “Ho! ho! ho!” of Truda’s booby cousin Tony rose above the cackle of the girls. Harmen was there again also. “Do you forgive me?” Truda had asked that morning, a little shamefacedly, for her. “No,” he had answered, “let’s talk of something else.”

“Anneke!” called Truda across the blazing sunlight.

Anneke turned paler than usual. “It is the sign!” she thought. For, in her foolishness, she had told herself that never would she venture to question Truda about girls who had hired their squires, but if Truda began, well, then——

She came away from the waterside, with her tub held out before her, hot from her work, through the lazy heat, to the shadow of the chestnut tree. The others were cool and merry; a great basket of cherries stood in the middle of the group.

“Well, have you got him already?” questioned Truda. “I was telling Corry and Suzy you were going to pay for a sweetheart.”

“Will she advertise for one?” said Corry, who had from childhood been Truda’s principal friend, and who

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now was being courted by the red-faced farmer lad, Tony.

"Nonsense," said Truda. "All she need do is to go to old Nell Trop in the Weavers Street at Overstad. That's where the girls apply who can't get a lover for themselves." The big innkeeper's daughter folded her fat pink arms, and looked triumphantly from Anneke to Harmen. "You go to Nell Trop in the Weavers Street," she said.

"It isn't true! You're chaffing me!" said Anneke; but some of them saw the flash in her eyes as Truda gave the address.

"It's true enough," remarked lumbering Tony Dunder. "We had a cow-girl at our place two years ago that got one cost her a florin. A florin he took, and everything free—the shows, and merry-go-rounds, and the waffles."

"And he treated her decent?" questioned Anneke, eagerly. "He—he just kept her company, and let her go home when she liked?"

"Oh, I dare say he treated her just as she wanted him to," replied Tony, laughing clumsily. Corry laughed also. Suzy sat silently eating cherries, and shying the stones into Anneke's tub.

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Anneke. "It's all chaff and rubbish!" The girls jeered back at her.

Harmen Reys bent forward, and, taking a big handful of cherries, threw them into the washing-tub. "Have some?" he said. "They're very good."

Anneke's heart was too full for any sort of answer. She crept back to her house and her work.

"Do you know, she intends to do it," announced Truda, and pursed up her lips.

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"Nonsense!" cried the other girls.

"I tell you she does. And, look here, we must have a lark. Of course, she will do it on Farmers' Thursday, when all the countryside is there. Harmen, you must go to Mother Trops, and get her to give you to Anneke."

"What!" cried Harmen Reys. "No, thank you; I'm going with you."

"So you shall, you dunderhead! But, first, you must fetch the fair Anneke. You will take her to the circus, and seat yourselves on one side; then we shall come in afterwards—a lot of us—the whole village—and seat ourselves opposite; then, presently, you'll think of some pretext to escape and come over to the empty seat beside me, and Anneke, who's paid for her lover——"

"Ho! ho! ho!" burst in Tony. The others all shook and cried out with laughing.

"What fun it'll be!" screamed Truda.

"I think it's rather low," said Harmen.

"Don't be a fool," remonstrated Tony.

"No," retorted Harmen, "I won't so long as I couldn't, anyhow, be as big a fool as you."

"Hush! hush!" interposed Truda. "Let's think the plot out. We must arrange about it all in a day or two."

"It'll keep till to-morrow," said Harmen, rising and stretching his long limbs. "The cherries are all eaten. I'm going home. I've got something to do." A loud laugh went up from them all, for it was well known that Harmen lived and loafed on his Indian corporal's pension.

"I'm coming with you," ejaculated Tony, stumbling to his feet.



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"Something to do means gin," said Truda, scornfully. "Why don't you go in and drink father's?"

"Because it comes too expensive," retorted Harmen.

"But if I give it you it costs you nothing."

"It couldn't be dearer than when you give it me," said Harmen with a smirking sneer.

He slung off with a jerk of annoyance. She jarred on him, especially of late. He wasn't a good man; he didn't mind a bad woman, but the worst man wants a woman to be tender.

"Truda isn't the sort of girl *I* should care to marry," said Tony, slouching along beside the other's army step.

"Nor is Corry," replied Harmen sharply.

The bumpkin grinned, a sudden break of white along his crimson face. "Who talks of marrying Corry?" he replied. "Marrying's one thing, and courting's another. Kermesse comes once in a year, and marriage comes once in a lifetime."

"Yes," said Harmen meditatively, his pale eyes dreamy with reminiscence of a sunny country where the wedding knot is more easily untied.

"And she hasn't got the money either that people say she has."

"What?" cried the other, suddenly attentive, all the dreaminess gone from his gaze.

"No, she hasn't," said Tony with malicious alacrity, "if everybody knew what *we* know! But then, luckily, they don't."

"Tony, let's go and have a drink."

"I'm agreeable, if you pay. You just take the train to Overstad and ask the registrar of mortgages there on whose property he registered a mortgage last Thursday 'No, thank you, not I,' says father when Uncle Batsy

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come to him. 'I don't go lending o' my money to chaps as speculate in corn!'

"Phew!" said the corporal between his teeth.

"But there's old Pete Peters, Tony: all his dead wife's money'll be Truda's some day."

"If he leaves it her. But he always says he is going to leave it to Anneke."

"That don't prove anything, coming from such a born liar. I wonder if he's really free to leave it as he chooses?"

"Let's take him for a drink, and make him tell us on his mother's bones! We shall find him under the beeches by the church."

They marched off in that direction.

"What's Truda done to you?" asked Harmen presently.

"Done to me? Nothing. What should she have done to me? We'll see whether she can always get as many Kermesse sweethearts as she chooses! A lubber may only be a lubber, but he's better than nothing at all."

"I see," said Harmen, scornfully. "That was last year, I suppose."

They found old Pete filling his pipe with newly purchased tobacco. "She's a very good girl," said Pete; his little eyes twinkled, disappeared.

"I shall leave her every penny I have," he said presently, comfortably ensconced in his favourite corner, in his favourite public-house. "I shall. By my sister's grave, I shall." He saw suitors on the horizon. He wanted to have suitors, that he might enjoy dismissing them. The young men gave him a couple more glasses of gin.

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"I shall leave her every penny, every penny," he said, nodding over his glass. "Yes, I swear it, every penny. By my mother's grave, I shall."

"Oh, hang your idiotic mother's grave," said Harmen, getting up to go.

Meanwhile Anneke, standing over the washtub, slowly thought the matter out. She felt she could no longer bear the public ignominy, not so much of never having possessed an accredited sweetheart, as of never having found a swain to take her to the fair. She knew that many a maid in her position would have started boldly for the Kermesse, and waited there until some honest fellow invited her to spend the evening with him, as in more exalted circles men came up to claim a waltz. But when she thought of such indelicacy her heart bumped. To hire a cavalier, to pay honourably for honourable companionship, that seemed a very different matter. "Nell Trop in the Weavers Street," she repeated to herself. "Overstad is such a big city, nobody will ever find out." She flattered herself that she had admirably kept her own counsel before her tormentors. It would be best to go on "Farmers' Thursday," when all the villagers, for miles around, trooped in to make high holiday. On that day, following his invariable custom, Uncle Pete would go across to Rotterdam to fetch his quarter's income, getting back at midnight with the money, sober as a judge. That was his Kermesse treat, he always used to say.

Yes, she would go, and, taking two tickets for the circus, would sit revealed to all beholders—especially to the young folks of her own village, most especially to Truda—revealed as a girl who can keep Kermesse, if

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she chooses, and keep it with better men than those she left at home. Her heart glowed as she pictured the hour of triumph to herself. For the twentieth time she counted the few florins in her purse. She believed she had enough.

### II

Two days later, on the morning of the momentous Thursday, Anneke, up betimes from a sleepless couch, hurried through her work as if she had not the whole long day before her. Presently she laid out her uncle's rusty Sunday clothes : she dropped from her trembling hands the fuzzy black hat she was brushing.

"Stupid !" growled Pete ; he rarely said anything more, but, then, he was always saying this. There were times when she almost regretted her father's volleys of oaths.

"I shan't be back till midnight," said Uncle Pete. She knew that. These quarterly trips to the bank were the supreme satisfaction of the old man's life. She watched him depart, a tottery old scarecrow with an abnormal umbrella, along the poplar-bordered road.

In the afternoon, having nothing left to do, she sat down to sew at some of the numerous clothes in which her soul delighted. It seemed astonishing, to her accustomed activity, how slow the hot hours passed. She dressed carefully, in her dark green gown, and fastened her mother's great gold ear-pins into the snowy, tightly fitting cap. Then, as seven o'clock, in the full glory of the solemn July evening, she crept forth, locked the cottage door behind her, and hastened away.

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The station was a mile off, along open road. But Anneke, trembling like a guilty thing lest the village cronies should observe her, made a circuit of two miles under cover of brushwood, along ditches and fields. The platform, when she reached it, was deserted. All the others had gone in the morning, making a day of it. She had watched them passing the window in excitable groups.

At Overstad Station there was plenty of commotion. The roar of the Kermesse seemed to rush out and welcome the trains. Over the whole city hung an atmosphere of burning grease; in the distance, about the vast Cattle Market, rose a yellow flare of dirty light against the tranquil sunset and the solitary evening star.

Anneke, avoiding that quarter, crept round to the Weavers Street, and studied the names inscribed on the doors, according to a custom very general in Holland.

The street was a side one, short, uncanny in its stillness. Before one of the tall houses a little child was playing on the doorstep. Anneke hoped it would go in.

"Well, my dear, and what are you doing here? Surely you ought to be at the Kermesse," said a pleasant voice behind her. She turned in alarm. The speaker was a tall man, with a somewhat gruff appearance, and a beard that looked as if it would better have fitted somebody else's face.

"Well," he continued, as she did not answer, "what do you say to going there with me?"

The idea of thus accompanying an unknown, unrecommended person struck horror into her breast. "Oh, no, no," she said anxiously. "Please go away. I have come here to see a friend." He fell back, laughing.

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"Perhaps your friend lives *there*!" he cried, pointing to a little house that hung twisted into a corner, half hidden between two tall neighbours—a little house, with a slouching doorway and a window that winked. She watched him turn the corner; she waited until he must be definitely gone. For a moment she desired to return to the station; she was miserable, she was alarmed; she took a few steps towards the road. Then a sort of bravado came over her—the dogged resolve to go through with it. She walked straight up to the little house and boldly rang the bell. An old woman opened the door.

"Do you know where Nell Trops lives?" asked Anneke, faintly.

"Nell Trops lives here, my pretty," said the old woman. "Come in."

Anneke followed the creature into a back room. Of procuresses, evil houses, dangers to the innocent, she knew nothing. The vices she had heard of were the vices of the fields.

"And what do you want of Nell Trops, my dear?" The old woman cast a sidelong glance all over the shrinking figure; her expression grew indifferent. Nothing worth much.

"I—I—I," stammered Anneke, her pale face a dusky red; "I had heard—I thought that here——"

"Then you had heard wrong," said the old woman sharply. She held the door open. There was a musty smell in the little dingy room.

"But there was a girl from our village got one," cried Anneke, emboldened by necessity.

"I dare say," replied Nell Trops, drily. Then, suddenly, a light seemed to break in upon her. "You

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want a sweetheart to go a-fairing with ? ” she said, with a cunning glance.

Anneke hung her head.

“ Is that all ? ” went on the woman briskly. “ Quite right, my dear, quite right. Yes, this is the correct address. Now, what sort would you like to have, my dear—town or country ? Do you like ’em fair or dark ? —and what are you going to pay for him ? ”

“ Oh, don’t ! ” said Anneke.

“ *My charge*,” said the old woman with precision, “ is fifty cents. With an umbrella, seventy-five.”

Anneke lifted her glance. “ Why with an umbrella ? ” she asked in sudden curiosity.

“ It has always been so,” replied Nell Trops, snapshly. “ In my mother’s time, and her mother’s before her. An umbrella looks respectable ; it means a better class. Every one knows that ; it’s a recognized fact, like the cathedral. Nothing’s changed but the prices—they’re lowered. Times are bad in everything. And the girls have got so bold, they find sweethearts for themselves ! ”

“ Please, I’ll take an umbrella,” said Anneke. Nell Trops went out, and locked the door behind her—from habit. The girl started up with a shriek. That dim consciousness of the world’s evil which is the torment and the safeguard of every innocent creature fluttered her whole heart with an agony of fear. “ Let me out ! ” she cried, “ let me out ! ”

Instantly the old hag stood before her. “ You fool,” said Nell Trops, with vast scorn, “ how pretty do you think you are, pray ? ” The words, dimly understood, struck the girl’s heart like a foul missile, leaving an indelible stain.

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"Would you like a sweetheart with a nice black beard?" continued Nell more gently, for her visitor's expression alarmed her. "Beards are extra respectable. You'd have to pay a quarter more for a beard."

"No, not a beard," replied Anneke, suddenly reminiscent of the stranger in the street.

"Well, I haven't got 'em in boxes like tin soldiers," said the woman, put out. "You should have let me know this morning, and you could have had half a dozen to choose amongst. Beards are *my* taste. A big beard and a bald head for me."

"Yes, yes, a bald head!" exclaimed Anneke, who now only wanted not to have the stranger.

Again the old woman went out, this time without closing the door. She returned immediately, ushering in the man from the street.

"Not—not this gentleman," was what Anneke tried to say. But she dared not. And, whilst the words still struggled in her throat—"There now, my dears," said Nell Trops, "you just go a-fairing together! A pretty couple you make," said Nell Trops. She almost pushed Anneke into the pasasge. "The florin, my dear, if you please. Yes, that's right. Come and tell me to-morrow how much you've enjoyed yourself!" The door closed behind Anneke. The room had been dark; the street did not seem much lighter.

"Now, let's hurry up and enjoy ourselves," said the stranger gruffly. "You'll find me a good sort. Good as gold, honour bright!"

Somewhat reassured, she walked on beside him in silence, towards the increasing tumult of the Market. As yet this excursion was not very enjoyable: she had



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pictured it altogether different. In fact, she was miserable.

But the Cattle Market—the central glory of the Kermesse—that certainly was a sight to be seen. Far away it shone into the deep blue silence, a yellow lake of many thousand oil lamps, with—high in air, obtrusive—the white electric glare. The uninterrupted bellow of sound—bands, singing, yells, cat-cries, calls of salesmen and showmen, pistol-shots, merry-go-rounds, organs—formed the music of a Pandemonium. Between the long alleys of flaring booths and stalls of every sort rocked a crowd of red-faced peasants, many of them jumping, hustling, shouting—all excited, and a large percentage drunk. Uniforms were everywhere in quantities, especially about the pipe-hung shooting galleries : men and women massed together—sombre clothes and muslin caps and golden ornaments—whirled, insensate, to the weary jingle of the merry-go-round. Before canvas walls, ablaze with kings and lions, stood acrobats and actors, gorgeously bedizened, hoarsely mouthing their offers of entertainment. And above it all, above the steam of the fritter-shops, the sputter of the fat little grease cakes or “puffers,” the big drums, the street songs, the somersaults, the jostlings, the vice and the vulgarity—above it all, and beneath the serenely solemn sky, everywhere, in a hundred medallions and paintings, the pure face, no less serenely unconscious, of the little girl-Queen of the Netherlands.

A great deal of it came back to Anneke now from memories of stray visits with her father when she was quite a child. But it was not at all as she had remembered it : it was noisy and common. Where possibly could be the wild delight of the others ? No wonder no

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one ever cared to take her. No wonder they said she was not like other girls.

There were plenty of gingerbread stalls in all directions ; there was plenty of gilt on the gingerbread ; but to some people gingerbread is quite unattractive, even when all the gilt is still on.

" Now, what would you like to see first ? " courteously inquired her companion. " There's a calf with two heads, of which one is a pig's, and there are some capital fighting fleas."

" Let's go to the circus at once," replied Anneke.

" Just as you like, it is rather late. And we can go to some of the shows when the circus is over."

They passed in—she paying for the tickets—and through a long, dimly-lit corridor reached their seats. The first thing she noticed on entering was that Truda sat just opposite with her party, and that next to Truda there was a vacant place. Almost simultaneously, as she turned to sit down, a muffled cry escaped her. Her companion had lost his beard, and, with it, his beetling eyebrows. Handsome Harmen stood laughing behind her. " Hush," he said, " it's all right. It's only a joke ! "

She had never seen a disguise before : she did not know that beards could be stuck on. As for jokes, she had small experience of those also. *They* knew, then—they would all know—that she had come to Overstad to hire a companion ! She sat down in her seat and quietly cried.

" Don't," he whispered presently, " the others will notice." She stopped crying at once. " And, besides, I can't bear to see you do it. Let's be pleasant and enjoy ourselves. Look, they're going to begin ! " A couple

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of clowns came leaping and laughing into the ring. Harmen settled down to the delights of the performance. Anneke tried to turn her eyes from the gay party opposite, who were evidently discussing and deriding her. She knew Harmen Reys but little : he was not of her village. She had always admired him from a distance : he was dashing, good-looking, his gaze was a caress. In these clothes he appeared different, almost a gentleman. She wondered what he wanted, what he intended to do.

The performance proceeded, and the people opposite grew restless. Truda, especially, began to make signs to her lover. In the first interval of ten minutes, when the circus half emptied, these appeals grew obstreperous. Tony came across and said something to Harmen. "You be hanged !" was the audible answer, the only one he got.

Innocent as Anneke might be—and she remained a woman, with all womanly instincts—she could not help realizing that Truda was claiming her lover.

"Truda wants you," she said softly.

"Let her want," was his reply.

"But—I think you ought to go to her."

"I so seldom do what I ought to."

"You might begin now."

"Do you know, I almost think I am beginning."

"Oh, what a leap that horse gave !"

"Did it frighten you ?"

"No ; only startled. I'm not soon afraid of horses."

"I thought you were such a coward. Truda says so."

"P'rhaps I am. I'm afraid of what wants to hurt me."

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"Nod away, Truda, nod away. You nod back to her, little Anneke; enjoy your triumph while you can!"

"What triumph?" asked Anneke.

He laughed at her. "Can't you really guess?" he said.

Yes, she could guess. She could see that, for some reason or other, Harmen, remaining beside her—Harmen, the Don Juan of the moment—openly flouted his sweetheart before her friends. He was noticeably amiable to Anneke; he got her a glass of lemonade and refused to let her pay for it. Other girls looked up at him as he bent over her, twirling his moustache. Certainly, for the moment, her success was complete. She smiled; she thought him delightful. He gave her his arm when the performance was over; and, ignoring the now utterly annihilated Truda, led out the lady of his choice.

They went into some of the shows together, Anneke selecting a menagerie and a collection of stereoscopic views. Harmen yawned, but acquiesced.

"And now," he said, "we must go and eat waffles." He conducted her to a white-and-gold pavilion, gay with the movements of immaculate cooks. He was making for a cabinet at the back.

"Not there, please," said Anneke. "Here in front we can see the people passing."

"But we want to be alone, do we not?"

"No."

A long silence followed the answer. They ate their waffles among the smells and the uproar.

"You're not the best of company to go Kermessing with," said Harmen. But a moment later he entirely changed his tone. He was very gentle and sympathetic, full of friendly interest. He told her how often he had

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pitied and admired her ; how Truda's coarseness had long disgusted him—he had never been actually engaged to Truda ; how this evening's *ruse* had simply been a means of approaching the better woman, Anneke, just the kind and tender helpmate for a scapegrace anxious to reform. All this music he poured into her unreluctant ears, amidst the clash of cymbals and the caterwaulings, and the ceaseless " By your leave ! " of the white-clad waiters, who, the waffles being eaten, now wanted these customers to depart. But the heads of the couple bent lower and their murmurs grew softer, and people respect that sort of thing at fairtime, especially the caterers, who know it to be the corner-stone on which the whole erection rests.

When she lifted her eyes at last, there was a happiness in them such as comes to no woman twice. She believed in him, purely, implicitly.

" I want to go home," she said.

" What, now ? Why, the fun is only just beginning."

" I want to go to the station"—she detained him.  
" Alone."

An oath escaped from his lips. It hurt her, but not disagreeably. It reminded her of the only man who had loved her before, and sworn at her.

" Why, what a fool you are ! " he said. " Come along with me, and we——"

" I am going to the station," she interrupted him.  
" Good-night."

She ran off into the darkness, thinking of nothing but joy. Her triumph of the evening she had entirely forgotten. On reaching the railway she asked for the train. They laughed at her : it had left twenty minutes ago. Then first since leaving home she glanced at a clock.

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The only train now available did not stop at her village. She would have to walk six miles in the middle of the night. Worse than that, she would get home, with the key in her pocket, an hour after Uncle Pete. She dimly wondered whether Harmen had known about the time? No, he was a good man. She knew already that she would get to love him. He must go to Uncle Pete, and obtain the old man's leave to court her. Uncle Pete was anxious she should marry: there would be no objection on his part. How nobly Harmen had spoken! Already she admired him from the bottom of her heart.

She got out at the other station and flew along the road. How glorious was the stillness around her, the mild light of the great yellow moon among the poplars and across the broad fields, where the cattle occasionally moved. All about her was softness, and sweetness, and silence: the roar of the evening seemed centuries away. And Harmen had truthfully told her he cared for her! Were this little soul of ours less infinite than heaven, how could it contain the whole of heaven for an hour?

As she approached the cottage, she saw that the old man was pacing up and down in front of it. She had known that he would be there, infuriate. But somehow, timid as she usually was, she had not found time to think of him.

"Hussy!" he shouted, as soon as she was near enough. And then he used a yet uglier word. He looked a grotesque figure in the moonlight, with his round umbrella and tall hat.

She hurried to open the door, that she might the sooner conceal his shouting. She was glad when they were safe in the cottage together, and the storm of his wrath broke loose over her alone. She listened, shrink-

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ing back, but calmly inattentive. He had never abused her thus before, only grumbled. But then, she had never given him cause.

"Gad, I have found you out!" he cried, "with your smooth white face and soft church manners! Go your ways, as much as you choose: only don't bring the brats to me!"

In an instant the brutal words turned her heart to stone. She faced her uncle, upright, by the flaring tallow candle. "I am sorry I missed my train," she said.

"And he let you come back by yourself?" asked Pete, more soberly, but with a sneer.

"I went alone. I met Harmen Reys. He was alone too. So we went to the circus together."

"Really? And that was all?"

"No." Her voice and manner again grew gentle. "He told me—uncle—he was fond of me"—very softly. "It seems he has thought—thought so for some time. He is going to ask you about it." Her head sank on her breast.

Old Pete sat down, and laughed till he shook.

"He's been in a mighty hurry about it!" chuckled old Pete. "Lor', it can't be more than three days ago that I told him about my money."

Anneke looked up, suddenly anxious. "What?" she said. "What do you mean?"

"He was mighty inquisitive about my money, he was. Who was I going to leave it to? I told him, you! Lor', what fools men are! I told him, you! By my mother's grave, I did."

"Uncle!" her voice wavered between gratitude and distress.

"And so I shall; it's true enough! Aren't you my

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natural, lawful heir ? Only—I ain't got any money to leave, not a hundred florins, I ain't. The money was your dead aunt's, and she left it all to Truda. The notary's got it, in the city. And whatever I saved—though that ain't much—was to go to Truda also ; that was what she made me agree to, and sign at the notary's. 'The savings is my money ; I won't have it go to your beggarly family,' she says. But I ain't saved much, I'm a poor man, a poor man, Anneke. And, besides, I ain't going to die yet awhile ! " He sat gloomily staring at the candle, in his big tattered armchair.

" Lor', what a lark ! " he said, brightening up again. " He's a cool chap, that Reys. I hadn't never meant to tell you, till after I was dead. But it's greater fun telling you now, and you deserve it for letting me stand about in the dark for two mortal hours. And me that tired ! "

" I don't believe it," she said bitterly. She had never spoken so to him before. " Nobody can ever believe you," she went on. " Nobody does. You can't have waited more than one hour, for instance. You always tell lies."

His pimpled face grew black with thunder. He pushed back the old tall hat, and leant forward on the umbrella. " I can tell truth when I choose," he said slowly, " as well as anybody. You'll never have a halfpenny of mine, you slut. All of it goes to Truda."

She flung herself forward, suddenly, desperately ; the candle streamed against her cheek. " Swear it to me," she cried hoarsely. " Swear it. Say you swear it by your mother's grave."

" Lor'," he answered, " have you found that out ? Well, every man has his weakness. I'll swear it, if



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you like, by my sister's grave, and by my mother's, too,"

She turned her back on him. "Good-night," she said, and went upstairs with her candle.

The old man, left in the dark, holloed to her in vain ; then, striking a light for himself, he went and banged against her door. He got no answer. Worn out, he stumbled and tumbled into bed, immediately falling asleep.

Next morning, at the usual hour, Anneke, with drawn features and red-rimmed eyes, came down and went about her work. To her uncle she spoke when necessary. Frequently she looked out of window. Her geranium-pots lay smashed outside—old Pete had done that in his rage last night, before the fastened door. She cleared up the mess and hurried in again. She was ashamed to show her face outside the door, until she knew how matters would come to stand between her and her last night's lover. She had always been a good girl—hitherto that had been her one satisfaction and solace.

Towards noon Harmen Reys came lounging along the canal and across the open space between the inn and the clump of cottages. Anneke laid down the pan she was scouring, and walked out to him at once in the laughing summer sunshine.

"Harmen Reys," she began, ignoring his pleasant greeting, "first of all I want to tell you this. What my uncle said to you was a lie, or as good as a lie. When he comes to die, all his money will go to Truda. I shall not have a penny. His money was all his wife's."

Harmen Reys' fair face flushed with swift annoyance. "Oh, nonsense. That can't be true," he said. "It's a lie of the old man's, Anneke." Truda had come out of

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the inn, and advanced halfway towards them. She stood irresolute—her eyes aflame.

“No, Harmen, it is true. He will leave me what he has, but then he has nothing to leave me. I thought you ought to know.” Her tones were wistful, though her face was firm. “I know it’s true. I am sure. But—Harmen——” She checked herself.

The handsome corporal slowly lifted his cap, and slightly bent his head. Then, leaving her standing there, he walked straight across to Truda.

“Well,” he said, extending his hand, “confess that I’ve paid you out for that slap in the face you gave me!”

## The Mother

### I

**I**N the long grey twilight of the chilly autumn evening the old woman stood gazing down the far descent of road. Around her the inhospitable pine-woods sank into the distance, darkling, on both sides of the desolate hill. Not a leaf stirred; the solemn stillness lay unbroken, but for the monotonous dripping of many thousand trees.

From her solitary cottage near the summit, half hidden behind a low bank of fir, a gleam of firelight deepened across the approach. Down the hills stretched straight the narrow by-road, dull yellow, faintly shiny, pebbly, weary, immovable length to the darkness, through the haunts and bright conversation of men.

"He's very late," said the mother aloud. "I'm thinking he gets to be later. I wonder, he likes a chat down in the village; wouldn't he have it? Last year I could see to that; I know of firs, where my father killed the fox."

She went back to the cottage, stumbling along beneath the heavy damp of the trees. The supper-pot was bubbling over. A magpie hung by the darkening window. "All right!" said the magpie. "Go away!"

"La, Blackie, it's me!" replied his mistress, lifting

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a skinny arm to light the lamp. "You surely don't want me to take myself off? I'm thinking you'd lose the only companion you ever had. You stupid, you took me for a tramp!"

"All right!" said the magpie, who may, or may not, have had recollections of other companions across field and forest, but who certainly now would have known Widow Quint's step at any time. His vocabulary was limited, like his list of acquaintances. Of these latter he had two: the widow, who loved, the widow's son, who ignored him. Likewise, for all contingencies of his tiny existence, he was possessed of two utterances which amply sufficed his philosophy—"All right!" "Go away!"

"La, it's not really late!" exclaimed the widow, who, like most lonely persons, spoke frequently aloud. "'Tis the days growing shorter misled me!" She stood, studying the cuckoo. "Not yet five o'clock, and the paraffin two hours longer! But I always have dreaded the boy's being late. Now, 'tis just my foolish fancy. Yes, Blackie's mistress is simply a fool! Dear, how often my little boy would say that, and never mean it! Nor he could bear any one else to repeat it; well he knew when he was had the clearer head of the two!" She laughed softly to herself, a tender little pitying laugh. "Clever boy on him," she said, looking into the supper-pot. "The onions are browning beautiful. Isaac'll be in before the cuckoo strikes again!"

"Go away," said the magpie.

The old woman stopped stirring. "Drat the bird!" she ejaculated. "Blackie, you ought to be whipped, if only you was built accordin'. I can't think why the little brute never took to the boy, and he the best boy

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that ever was—ay, or will be! No, that's saying too much, but one soon thinks one's owl an eagle." The widow never sought an explanation in the fact that the boy, being jealous of his mother's affection, had not shown a liking for the bird. She had been slow to learn, through her own life's experience, that love is with most of us largely a matter of take.

For more than sixty years she had lived in this lonely cottage; she had been born in it, an only daughter, and after her mother's death, she, then being fifteen, had taken the vacant place by the taciturn widower's side. When the bloom of her youth had faded away from her, the father, also dying, left Mary alone in an unknown world. She had been an under-keeper in the service of the baron to whom the woods belonged. A new man, some seven years her junior, was appointed to the post and the cottage; a difference of opinion arose as to the value of her father's old bureau; he proposed that she should settle it by marrying him, and she accepted the offer, for why should she do anything else?

By the time her first babies were born she was nearing forty. The three eldest children successively died, in infancy or in early childhood, torn from a grasp whose despair might have vanquished any power but Death. The youngest only survived—Isaac.

It was after two long years of silence that his feeble puling once more seemed to fill the cottage; she never for a moment doubted that this son of her decline had come to stay.

"He will be the prop of my old age," she said. "I shall live to kiss his children."

"Our times are in God's hand," said the minister, sitting by the bedside, very solemn.

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"And a good thing, too," replied Mary Quint. "I'm thinking God remembered that when He sent me my Isaac. I shall laugh over him as Sarah did."

"My good woman, you've got your facts wrong," objected the minister peevishly. He was hot from his long walk, and he disapproved of poor people's talking nonsense or sentiment.

Mary hugged to her breast one small fact she had got right. "Please, Dominé," she said a little anxiously, "you won't object to my calling him Isaac?"

"I hope it's a family name," said the Dominé.

"Oh, it's bound to be that," replied Mary. "'Tis a name in your family, isn't it, John?"

"Surely," assented her husband, who was sometimes good-natured and never over-scrupulous, and who cared for nothing in the world but drink.

"Isaac let the young child be then," declared the minister, rising pompously, "and may he indeed prove a Son of the Promise! Quint, I'm going. It's an hour and a quarter from here to the village."

"Surely," said the under-keeper again, rising to accompany his rare visitor to the door, "for a gentleman it would be. The likes of me does it in fifty-five minutes; but what is the likes of me?"

"All men are alike, Quint—ahem!—before God," replied the minister, annoyed; "but our physical powers undeniably vary. That is of little consequence, however, for the Bible expressly warns us that bodily exercise profiteth nothing."

"Does the Bible tell such a—thing as that?" cried the keeper, amazed.

"Certainly," replied the stodgy little parson, reprovingly. "You should read your Bible, Quint."

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He paused just outside the threshold. "How old is your wife?"

"Thirty-nine come next April, God willing," replied the keeper promptly. He always deducted a couple of years from his consort's actual age: he called this "splitting the difference."

The Dominé meditatively shook his big head.

"She has foolish ideas," he said. "I fear she is rather a foolish woman, Quint."

"Yes, Dominé, so she tells me herself," replied the keeper, "over and over again; but still I can hardly believe it. There never was any one like her for cooking and baking. She's got no book-learning to boast of; but then, as I'm always a-telling her, we can't all get clothed and educated at other people's expense"—the Dominé winced: he was a charity-boy. "Now, what use would your reverence, saving your presence, be in a family, with washin' and bakin'? She sees it at once, sir. No use at all."

"Good-day," said the Dominé. The keeper went back to the inner room, where his wife lay. "John, come and look at little Isaac," said a voice from the press-bed. "He's got a dimple in his chin, John, just like what my father had."

"You're a fool," replied the husband, filling his pipe. "You always was."

Little Isaac grew up, and his dimple deepened. He was an easy-going child, all good-nature and love of tranquillity. He took an early dislike to his father's vehement caresses and violent abuse: on the whole, he experienced a distinct sensation of pleasure when, before his seventh year had reached its completion, the noisy, brawling voice dropped out of his existence, and he was

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left alone in the cottage with a mother whose love and whose anger were both equally righteous and calm.

The closing year or two of John Quint's poor life had been one black tempest of drunkenness, lighted up by fierce flashes of repentance. At last the thing happened which the wife had long tremblingly foreseen. On a dark December night the keeper stumbled once too often. Next morning they brought him to his cottage shot through the head. The widow thanked the sympathetic and the curious before she bade them go. "I'm not accustomed," she said, "to seeing so many people about me. It confuses me." All slunk away, except the minister.

"Mary," began the minister, "this is a dreadful visitation."

She sat by the fireside, her face averted from the bed, frightened, little Isaac plucking at her knee.

"Ahem!" continued the minister, "it is a visitation, and also a warning to all of us" ("us," indeed! he thought). Unconsciously he fingered the blue ribbon at his button-hole. "Alas! there can be no doubt that your husband was under the influence"—mechanically he bent over the bedside: at one leap the woman lay between him and the corpse!

"Tut! tut!" exclaimed the minister, starting back. Little Isaac, upset on the hearthstone, began to cry shrilly. "Hist!" said his mother. And he stopped.

"Why this futile palliation?" cried the minister, audibly snuffing. "Mary, I trust you have not learnt to feel sympathy for your poor husband's failing. Your life is too lonely up here, my good woman. Well, an end will now soon come to that. You will live in the village henceforth, and your child——"



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"Dominé, please go away," said the widow, shielding the dead man behind her.

"Oh, of course, if you wish it," replied the minister, in high dudgeon. "But, observe, I shall not soon come again. The distance from the village is more than an hour and a quarter, and if it had not been for John Bost's meeting me with his cart——"

"The cart is waiting," said the widow; "I hear the harness jingle."

"Certainly it is waiting. He was afraid of his horse catching cold up here. But I said I must speak to the widow. What is the chance—the off-chance—of a horse catching cold, compared to—to—a human soul?"

"The widow!" Mary Quint winced at the novel title which would henceforth always be hers. But she only held out her hand to her son without stirring from her guard.

The Dominé departed towards the door. "Take care that you do not make an Ishmael of your Isaac," he said with a suave relish, "you Hagar in the desert!" Thus he retreated in triumph, eager to repeat to Petronella, his sister, who was proud of him, this new specimen of his wit. The Dominé was still young; he would yet have numerous opportunities of increasing in foolishness.

The widow, left in peace, sat gazing at her dead husband, and gradually a few tears rolled down her cheek. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "I—I don't think it was exactly love, John; not as some wives feel; but perhaps that is my fancy. I think I did my best—and you did yours. I'm very sorry." The boy, pulling at her skirts, whined for her to come away. She followed him to the window; a wintry drizzle fell slanting against

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the black outline of the firs. "Isaac," she said, but she spoke to herself—"Isaac!" She lifted his face to her own. "Isaac, if I'd never had children, I don't think I'd ever have known!" She let the boy's head drop and looked out into the rain.

A few days later, when the funeral was over and everybody had forgotten her, and everything went on again, she dressed in her best mourning, took her boy by the hand, and trudged away to the village and the great house beyond. She left the child at the lodge: then she faced the hall door, the big dog, and the butler.

"Quint!" said the grey-haired Lord of the Manor, glancing over his glasses and joining his finger-tips. "Yes, of course, Quint! Very sad." Then he looked down at his writing-table, and, being a kind-hearted man, reflected what a bore things were.

"Yes, it certainly was very sad," he repeated, wheeling round to the figure in black, "and also——" he checked himself, "very sad."

"Mynheer the Baron, my father served you faithfully," said the widow, "for more than forty years."

"Yes, of course," replied the Baron. Then the incongruousness of his expression, in our present dispensation, struck home to him. "I mean, of course, I am aware of the fact."

"And my husband—did his best," continued Mary tremulously. "Mynheer the Baron, I don't mean to speak about that, but I've lived in the cottage more than half a century!"

"Whew!" said the Baron. "I see. 'Tis a lonely cottage. You'll be much better down in the village."

"And now my one hope and prayer is this, that

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Mynheer will let me stay on up there with the child ! I've never asked any one anything. I don't know how to speak properly—much less to Mynheer the Baron." The widow clasped her hands in front of her. "I've always lived alone."

"Seems to me you know how to ask right enough," said the Baron with testy good-humour. "The cottage has invariably gone with the place."

"I could do a certain amount of the work, Mynheer, saving your presence." Baron Varik laughed, glanced up, and suddenly steadied his features. "I could look after the firewood, for instance, and keep off children and vagrants——"

"And catch the poachers," interrupted the Baron.

"No," said the widow ; and yet, but for womanly unobtrusiveness, she might have told him how twice her keen watchfulness had enabled her muddle-headed husband to effect an arrest. "No, I couldn't pretend to be aught of a gamekeeper or claim aught of a gamekeeper's pay."

"Oh, of course, I must make some arrangement when you leave," said the Baron hastily. "A small pension——" He paused, unwilling to commit himself, for these things were done by rule.

"'Tis the cottage I want !" cried the widow, forgetting all timidity. "I've been born there, Mynheer the Baron : and there's no habit grows on one like loneliness. And my boy, that's seven already, must grow up to be the Baron's keeper, and live in the cottage as the rest of us have done !"

"Seven !" exclaimed the Baron, still fretfully smiling. "He'll take time, my good woman, to grow up !"

"He'll do it as fast as he can," replied the widow.

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"Nobody shall do it faster. It don't take long to grow up!"

"Good Lord, no, that's true!" exclaimed the Baron. "It seems only yesterday I was a small boy myself!" and he went into the next room, where his wife was sitting with some fancy-work before her.

"My dear, here is the Widow Quint," he said, "and she asks to be my under-keeper!" and then he told her all. "My father built the cottage on purpose for the under-keeper to live in," he grumbled, "and she can't support herself on the pension, besides."

"My dear," said the Baroness, smiling, "your reason for wishing a thing to be done is always that it has been done before."

"And a very good reason too," retorted her husband. "If you wish her to have the cottage, of course she must have it. She ought to go down to the village and work."

"Surely I expressed no opinion," replied the Baroness, still smiling over her work. "Far less did I give advice. If she does half a keeper's work, couldn't she get half a keeper's pay?"

The Baron drummed his fingers against the window-pane. "But, then, how am I to *book* that?" he burst out at last, in evident distress. "The pension I can book as has always been done. It comes under 'III—The Estate.'"

"Book it as treasure laid up in heaven," said the Baroness.

"That is 'Charity—VIII,'" replied the Baron. "I wonder whether my steward will consider that correct?"

"Before I married you," continued the lady smoothly, "I imagined that only shop-people 'booked.'"

"My dear, do not let us return to that fruitful, and

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fruitless, subject of discussion. I will do as you wish about the widow," he sighed. "She might at least have been young and good-looking."

"Vrouw Quint? She has a very striking appearance. I notice her every Sunday in church."

"Every Sunday you go," corrected the Baron, and, with that parting bit of compensation, he went back to Vrouw Quint.

"You can have the cottage," he said quickly, "and half your husband's wages, and the usual pension. And you must do half your husband's work. You must arrange about that with the head-keeper, Basset."

For a moment the widow stood silent. "I'm a bad hand at speaking my thanks," she said then, "but I'm thinking Mynheer the Baron feels them."

"Egad, my wife's right," thought the Baron; "the woman has fine eyes."

"Oh, I hope Basset won't mind!" exclaimed the widow.

The Lord of the Manor bit his lip. "You must distinctly understand that a certain amount of work will be required of you, for the pay—you understand me?—must come out of the estate."

"I understand, Mynheer the Baron," said the widow, in the doorway. "And Isaac, when grown up, must make good all my deficiency."

The Baron followed her, fearing he had seemed unkind. "So Isaac is to be trained for my service?" he said pleasantly.

The widow stopped under the hall lamp. "Please God," she said vehemently, all her gratitude bursting forth, "he shall learn to be such a servant to your honour as few masters have had before!"

## THE MOTHER

'Tut, tut ! I am nearly sixty-five," said the Baron.

"Who knows what may befall ?" replied the widow.

"Was I not an old maid at thirty-five ? And see, I am a widow before fifty !" She went back to the lodge and fetched Isaac, giving a penny to each of the lodge-keeper's stolidly astonished children. That night she cried over the boy long and silently : he always remembered those tears as the last he saw his mother shed.

Then the current of their lives, unbroken now by squalls, flowed smoothly onward. But Isaac easily comprehended that absence of storm-winds did not mean a licence to drift, and he opened his sails, as small mariners will, to a gentle, but consistent, breeze. He grew up conscious that he might do what he liked as long as he liked no wrong. There came a period, vainly delayed, when he must frequent the far-off village school. His mother could not leave her forest, where less wood was now stolen (as Basset unwillingly admitted) and fewer snares were set than on any other part of the estate. She bade the boy "God-speed," and ridiculed his dread of the lonely roads ; but she spent days and nights in anxiety and supplication. Every morning she watched his shiny knapsack out of sight ; every evening she toiled to the turnpike to meet him. She loved the glint of the knapsack, and polished it long after other children's had dulled to a rusty brown.

Isaac, with his good looks and good humour, all blue eyes and broad dimples, did well at school, and wherever he went. He preferred not to exert himself by nature, but whatever duty gave pleasure to his mother he was always prepared to perform. Once or twice he was first of his class for her sake, and on the occasion of a national festival he recited a patriotic poem in the

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courtyard of the manor-house before all the school, half the manor-house servants, and the manor-house family itself. "The boy's a good boy," said the Baroness graciously. "He has a good mother. But he's very unlike you in face, Vrouw Quint."

That night his elation was damped by his mother's unreasonable crossness, a thing he was least of all accustomed to. He burst out at last with suppressed irritation—

"Why, mother, whatever have I done?"

"Hush!" she said. "Nothing, Isaac. You can't help it, boy. I was only thinking. The Baroness was right: you are much like your father in manner as well as in face."

"Is that what you are angry with me for?" he questioned sullenly.

"God forbid!" she exclaimed with superfluous vehemence. "Isaac, never dare to say anything like that again!"

The boy shrank back, cowed.

An hour later she crept up the few steps to his garret. "You are a good boy," she said in the dark. "Oh, Isaac, you are all I have! Promise me you will always be good."

"I promise," he answered under the bedclothes. And then she kissed him—an unusual thing—kissed him through the sheet.

He was thirteen now, and school days were over. She got him taken as odd boy at the home farm. He brought his first week's single florin home to his mother, and, whatever may have happened before or after, that remained the proudest moment of Mary Quint's whole life.

## THE MOTHER

"Isaac," she said, "you are not a man yet ; but, also, you are no longer a child. You are one of Mynheer's servants. Remember this—remember what I told you—whatever you do for Mynheer, you can never repay our debt."

"I intend to do my best," he answered. But she caught him by the arm.

"Isaac, my Son of the Promise," she cried, drawing him towards her, "I have toiled night and day for this moment ! Isaac, you will be faithful, will you not ?"

He looked up into her pallid face. "Why, yes, mother," he said. "Oh, you've been a good mother to me, mother ! I love you heart and soul !"

A couple of years later the steward sent him to assist the widow, and gradually he took upon himself all the work that had once been his father's. The Baron, meeting Vrouw Quint in a plantation, informed her, with a sigh of relief, that she now would receive only her pension. "And mind you henceforth do no manner of work," said the Baron, with a twinkle in his eye. "I have no objection to your living with your son if you wish. But should I catch you feeding pheasants, I must send you away. You are pensioned as an under-keeper's widow. You are booked as pensioned. Good-day !"

## II

THE widow sat by the fireside waiting, as she waited every evening of her life. Presently Isaac would come in from his work, and then she would forget she had waited.



## THE MOTHER

There came a knock at the door, and the widow looked up surprised.

"Go away!" cried the magpie, for that was his rule after sunset.

The widow placed her hand on the bolt, but the voices outside reassured her.

She admitted two "neighbours"—a mile across country!—the big farm-wife, Vrouw Brodel, with her pretty daughter Christine.

"We are late," remarked the farm-wife, panting; "one of our men should have met us at the village. Woman, I wonder you're not afraid to be murdered. Some day you will be. I *am* afraid, and I'd thought perhaps Isaac—— Hold your tongue, Christine; I shall say as I choose."

Pretty Christine had been shaking her head to the widow. The latter flashed her eyes on her. Pretty Christine looked away.

"Men murder with an object," said the widow's grave voice. "I expect Isaac in every minute. He will gladly walk home with you."

"Oh, no, no," murmured pretty Christine, with deep energy. "Please tell mother, Vrouw Quint, the roads are perfectly safe!"

"I have been out on them and in the wood these sixty-three years, night and day," said the widow, "and never met with an injury from man or from beast."

"Quite possible," replied the farm-wife, and insolently jingled her heavy gold ear-rings. "But *I* am afraid. It seems to me, widow, your Isaac comes home very late!"

"Yes, yes, we can't possibly wait for him! We *can't* wait for Isaac," cried pretty Christine.

## THE MOTHER

"All right. Go away," said the magpie.

The widow lifted her gaze to Vrouw Brodel's red face.

"Ah, what time, pray, neighbour," she said coldly, "do you deem that my son should be in?"

But the other, vexed to find herself thwarted, replied with much spite: "At the time when all other men are back with their wives. 'Tis not good for young blood to remain single, neighbour Quint."

The widow's eyes flashed. "Isaac always leaves work last," she said proudly. She tapped on the floor with her foot.

"It's going to rain, mother," interposed the girl's voice from the window. "We must hurry if we want to get home!"

At these words the farm-wife, who had on her best cream-ribboned bonnet, hastened out to inspect the black sky.

"Well," she said desperately, "Isaac may not be here before midnight! You should keep him in better order. Catch *my* sons not turning up at meal-times! Well, neighbour, good-night!"

The widow's indignation did not permit her to answer. She sat by the table, and was angry with the cuckoo for his ostentatious proclamation of the half-hour. "But the woman is a fool," she said aloud. "A mother, and not to fathom her own daughter's heart! Aha! little Christine, I found out your secret six months ago—in one flash of the eye, at the church door, in passing! You won't cheat *this* mother, Christine—that's his step!"

The keeper came in, accompanied by his dog, Beppo. He was a tall fellow, well-built, in his faded brown clothes, and his boyish good looks suited well with the great leather boots and the gun.

## THE MOTHER

"You have just missed Vrouw Brodel," said his mother. "She was here not ten minutes ago."

"Indeed!" said the son, hanging up his empty game-bag.

"But I suppose you don't mind about that? She wanted you to see her safe home."

"Another time I shall be very willing. After supper, if possible."

"Christine was with her. Christine is very pretty, Isaac."

"Yes, mother, but I couldn't have seen much of her good looks in the dark. I'm very hungry."

"Well, supper has been waiting some time."

They ate in silence. Constant seclusion had made them a taciturn pair.

Besides, the widow was screwing up her devotion to a lengthily meditated step. As she cleared up the remnants—at a moment when her face was turned away from him—she began:

"You're a grown man now, Isaac, nearly four-and-twenty. It's time you were marrying, I sometimes think." Her own voice startled her, saying the terrible words.

He had risen to light his pipe. He stopped in the act. "Why, mother, are you tired of looking after me?" he said.

She did not answer, but turned. They stood facing each other for a moment, then, before he knew what he was doing, he had thrown his arms round her neck.

"Have done, Isaac, have done!" cried the widow. "For shame! A grown man to be kissing! You haven't done that since you was quite a small boy!"

The keeper went back to the hearth.

## THE MOTHER

"Nor you haven't talked of turning me out," he said ; then his face grew long, and he puffed in silence at the freshly lighted pipe. At last he said gravely : " I don't intend to marry."

" Why ? " exclaimed the widow, anxiety mingling with exultation in her accent. And as he did not immediately answer : " Men ought to marry. Don't think I'm selfish ; I should rejoice to see you marry a good girl like Christine ! "

Isaac drew the dog towards him, perhaps hardly conscious that he did so. Presently, looking his mother full in the face, " Would you really ? " he asked. For a moment she did not answer ; then she simply said, " Yes." She sat down in her usual arm-chair, and began at her interminable knitting. The clock ticked.

" Isaac, how strange your manner is ! " she said, after a long silence ; she was knitting on very fast. " Why, boy, if I didn't know all your heart, and you an honest lad from your earliest youth upward, as I well know you are and always will be—why, Isaac——"

" Well ? " he said, his chin set firm on the palm of his hand.

" Well ! Nothing. If I didn't—but, you see, I do ! "

" Mother, I don't understand you."

" Yes you do, Isaac. You and I have always understood each other, thank God ! And I thank Him, too, that when your time comes, there'll be nothing to prevent your asking an honest maiden to be your wife. I hope it'll come soon, Isaac. Before God, I do." She rose to quit the room that he might not see her face.

" Mother ! " he cried after her, " wait a moment. I must be off again to-night."

" Off ! " she exclaimed, in troubled amazement.

## THE MOTHER

"Why, it's getting to be every night, it is! It didn't use to be so in your father's time. I can't think what Basset means by it!"

"Basset?" repeated the son. "'Tisn't Basset. I like to take a look round before turning in."

"Ah, I told Susan Brodel that was *your* view of work!" said the widow triumphantly.

He reddened in the glow of the fire. She drew nearer and began gently stroking his yellow hair.

"Don't," he said, "don't!"

"It rejoices my heart to see how faithfully you serve your master. But, Isaac, I can't help disliking your being out thus night after night. I lie and think of those long hours when I used to wait for your father. And one morning they brought him me, dead!" She shuddered ever so slightly.

The son smoked. Again a heavy silence sank between them. At last he said: "I have never asked you before. I have never asked any one. To-night we are speaking of many things—strange things. Tell me—what made my father's gun go off?"

She stood behind him immovable.

"Keepers' guns don't," said the son, smoking.

"Hush!" The cuckoo burst out, hooted eight hideous calls, and disappeared. The room grew doubly silent.

"Was it a poacher killed him?"

"No."

"Then he was drunk!" Isaac spoke thickly. The words came pouring out. "It was that, I am sure of it. I have always known it, though I never dared to ask. You spoke of him, mother, so—so tenderly. I was very little when it happened; nobody told me.

## THE MOTHER

Somehow I have always known it, dreaded it. My God, he was drunk!"

She neither moved nor spoke.

"That is why you hate drunkenness so madly!" His voice rose to a cry. "Now I understand! I have always understood. My God!"

"Hush, Isaac. Be silent. It is not for you to judge your father. Be thankful you have not his temptation. He was a good man. We all have our failings. Be humble, and, above all, give thanks!"

"Nay, I do not judge him. I do not judge him," said Isaac. "I, least of all." Then for more than an hour they sat side by side without exchanging another word. Once or twice the dog, half rising, licked his master's hand. From time to time, as the hands neared the hour, Isaac glanced up almost apprehensively at the clock.

"I hate that cuckoo," he said suddenly. And he went to get his cap and gun.

"Why, Isaac, how silly you are! You said that the other day."

"Well, I do. One never knows when it is going to burst out at one."

"At the hour and the half-hour," said the widow coolly. She picked up her ball. "Jane, at the turn-pike, has one that calls out the quarters."

"Well, that would almost be better." He walked to the door. "How you can endure him and the magpie in the silence is more than I understand. Well, mother, you've a good conscience. Remember your promise; you won't sit up. Beppo, look after your mistress."

The widow gazed up at the offending clock, at the fast-closed little door, which, in another moment or two,

## THE MOTHER

would fly open with a bang. "La! he couldn't wish me," she reflected, "not to know what o'clock it was! And how should I know he was near coming home? 'Tis my one comfort, is the cuckoo and Blackie. All right, Blackie; all right; all right."

"Go away!" replied Blackie, who hated being disturbed of nights.

Isaac walked on very fast at first through the drip-drop of the woods; then, presently, he slowed down, as a man who comes to himself and realizes that he is hurrying nowhere. He paused, struck off to the right with apparent resolve, hesitated, walked on a few paces, turned back again.

"O God!" he said, under his breath. "O God!"

Something stirred in the black masses of underwood beside him. Some bird, half aroused from its sleep. He went on through the dripping darkness, twisting backwards and forwards with swift indecision, not as if stalking or doubling, but like an animal attracted to one spot, and as fatally repelled.

A grey stain showed on the footpath a few yards in front of him. It rose, screeching, across the dense branches—an owl! For a space its shrieks followed him through the stillness. Then again all was silent: the cloud-masses deepened in swift changes overhead.

"What a night for the poachers!" he thought. "Would to Heaven they but came!"

He was walking quite fast again, away into desolate spaces, the wide mist of the heath. He stood still.

"'Tis no use," he said aloud, "I can't help it. O God, you see that I can't!" He faced round, and soon the swiftness of his steps almost changed to a run.

In the thickest of the forest he broke away from the

## THE MOTHER

narrow footpath and dodged rapidly amongst the trees. At last, pausing for breath, he halted before a big oak, no more noticeable than the others around it. But Isaac, without any hesitation now, plunged a feverish hand into the hidden recesses of its stem, and, drawing forth a bottle, drank greedily and long.

"Ah!" he said in a deep sigh which seemed to linger on the stillness. He walked leisurely now, up and down, with the bottle in one hand. And from time to time he took a slow draught in the tranquil dark and the silence, sometimes with a half-suppressed shudder of content.

He was thinking of his mother's words about her dead husband: "Your father was a good man, Isaac. He had his weaknesses—who has not? But he was a good man." Never had he realized his powerlessness more deeply than to-night. "Mother, you would say the same of me. God grant you may never have occasion!" He lifted his handsome face as if to the lowering clouds above him. "I can't help myself!" he cried aloud, and then his voice dropped to a whisper. "Never," he said. "No, little Christine, I may be a coward, but I'll never be a cad." With a swing of the arm, he flung his gun back and started homewards. "Some day I shall end like father," he thought, "but not until mother is dead." He began whistling a music-hall tune of the day.

From a thicket he had just passed, whistling, two men crept forth and looked after him.

"Whistle away, Master Isaac," said one; "here's a hare you may whistle for!"

"Shut up, Tom," replied his elder companion; "he's as smart a keeper as ever stepped, and a very good fellow."



## THE MOTHER

There's a hollow oak I've noticed will do first-rate to hide things in. Come along."

Isaac stopped his whistling long before he neared the cottage. And as he crossed its threshold he mechanically drew himself up with a jerk. In the dark the dog, Beppo, struck a light tail along the floor.

"Good-night, mother," said Isaac steadily, before the half-open door.

"Good-night, boy ; good-night ! "

He tramped upstairs to his garret.

The next day being a Sunday, mother and son spent their morning, according to an invariable rule, in the distant village church. As they came out at the central door the Baron stopped them, and walked a few paces by the widow's side, which mark of favour was the highest that he could confer on any of his humbler dependants. Isaac fell back.

"If it weren't for Sunday church," said the Baron, "I do believe you'd never come down to the village from year's end to year's end. One would think you disliked your neighbours."

"No, indeed. No, indeed," replied the widow. "But, saving your presence, Mynheer the Baron, if you'd lived all your life in the backwoods, you'd feel like a squirrel yourself."

"I wish I were half as frisky," said the Baron. "Well, well, I've no right to complain. I'd never have thought to see Isaac my gamekeeper."

Still hale at eighty something, the Baron walked almost erect.

"And a very good keeper he makes, I'm told," said the Baron cheerfully, nodding his silvery hair.

The old woman, in her stiff cap and gown, smiled.

## THE MOTHER

"Thank God and Mynheer the Baron, he is what he is," she answered; "and I wish he was more. Not that I'm complaining. In some ways 'tis hard work—night after night, and the winter nights a-coming! Don't please think I'm afraid, Mynheer the Baron. I well know every trade has its own peculiar dangers; and wasn't I a keeper's daughter, and a keeper's wife and mother?—and, la! I was a bit of a keeper myself! Still, I'm glad every night of my life to hear my boy's good-night."

"But he needn't go out every night of your life," objected the Baron. He struck a little irritably at a pebble with his stick.

Whereupon the widow's serious features assumed that air of tranquil triumph which had been a secret source of amusement to her neighbours ever since the day when she had first led Isaac to the village school.

The Baron now watching her, also laughed good-humouredly. "Well, well, Basset says the hillside woods are the best looked after on the whole estate."

"They were that in my father's time, were they not, Mynheer the Baron?"

Well, well—perhaps they were. I have an idea, Vrouw Quint, you consider the hillside woods belong to you quite as much as they do to me?"

"No, Mynheer the Baron," replied the widow gravely. "But I know every stick and every stone of them, and have done these fifty years. The money value is yours, sir."

"Well, well," said the Baron again, "there's a pretty girl waiting to walk home with you. Isaac is gone, is he? Or only lagging behind? H'm. Good-day Christine Brodel. Good-day, Vrouw Quint."

## THE MOTHER

" 'Tis a long walk for a girl by herself, Christine," remarked the widow, as they trudged on side by side.

" Father's behind," replied Christine, " with—with Isaac."

" Your mother doesn't come to church as often as she might," continued the widow.

" No, nor Isaac wasn't there last Sunday," said the girl.

" Isaac had some snares to look after," protested the widow quickly. " Well, well," she added in a gentler tone, " your mother's very stout."

" Yea, and she don't like to rob the old horse of his Sunday rest."

" Nor Isaac can't bear to see me start alone. La ! ' Judge not that ye be not judged.' You're right, girl ; there isn't a truer text in the Bible."

For some minutes after that each was busy with her own thoughts along the sodden road.

" It is a great way," said Christine. " Dear, how you must tire of it ! But you were born in the cottage, weren't you ? and I suppose you'll——" She checked herself.

" No, I shan't," replied the widow coolly. " When my son marries, I take myself off."

" Oh, you couldn't ! " exclaimed the girl, all a-blush with vexation. " His wife 'd never—she——"

" Well, she ? " said the widow provokingly.

" I don't know anything about her," replied Christine with some spirit, " but the whole country knows about you and your son. Nobody 'd venture to part you, Vrouw Quint."

" Part ! " repeated the widow, her eyes far away over the tree-tops. " Divide, you mean ? No wife could

## THE MOTHER

do that, but she separates. God has willed it so, little Christine. Your father is calling—now, where is that booby of an Isaac? Gone altogether? Disappeared? La! what fools young men are in our days!”

She trudged on alone through the barren autumn landscape, through the sullen autumn day. At the turnpike, where dwelt her nearest neighbour and friend, lame old Kate Lonkeboor, she stopped for a few remarks about the weather, then turned off towards the hill and the woods. She felt tired, and breathed with some difficulty; yet, from old habit, she found it almost impossible to keep to the open road; before she had gone any distance all trace of her was lost among the trees.

She had penetrated into the heart of her familiar woods, when a low whistle struck suddenly on her ear. She knew the meaning of that whistle immediately. It was a signal. She darted round a low plantation of brushwood, and almost ran up against Tom Bunsing.

“D——” cried the poacher, starting back. Two pheasants hung from his elbow.

“I recognized your whistle!” said the widow quietly. But she gasped.

“D—— you for an old spy!” said Tom Bunsing. “I knew your precious son was on t’other side of the hill. Oh, on t’other side—ha! ha!”

“I shall report you to Basset. You shall be prosecuted,” said the widow fearlessly.

Tom Bunsing laughed. “No you won’t,” he replied threateningly. “You’ll keep a quiet tongue in your head. There’ll be more reportings some day than you bargain for. Give my love to your dear son, my lady, and tell him I shall drink his health to-night. Ta, ta!”

## THE MOTHER

"Oh, the scoundrel!" cried the widow, trembling with rage. "I shall certainly report you to Basset!"

She hurried on home, full of her indignation. Isaac was pacing the small kitchen in one of his restless moods. She got ready their mid-day meal. They had nearly finished it before she told of her adventure with Tom Bunsing.

"What did he say?" exclaimed Isaac, dropping knife and fork. "Did he say that? What did he say, mother, about drinking my health?"

"Goodness, Isaac, what's the matter? How pale you are! You've got cold, these wintry days, in the woods. After dinner I'll make you some——"

"No, no; I'm all right. What did he say about drinking my health?"

"Oh, that was his insolence. I shall certainly tell Basset."

"Mother, I do wish you'd leave the care of the woods to me!"

Her thin cheek coloured ever so faintly, but she only called to the dog. She could make nothing of Isaac's manner. Instead of sitting dozing over the Sunday fire, he started up on the first opportunity and hastened out. The widow remained pensive, occasionally talking to Blackie, for Beppo, his dinner over, had followed his master.

Presently the lame turnpike-woman looked in for a chat, and from Katey Mary Quint learnt, amid a flood of other gossip, that Tom Bunsing had announced his intention of marrying Christine Brodel. For Tom Bunsing, though he went poaching from sheer devilry, was the son of a small but respectable farmer.

"Aha! I understand!" said the widow to herself.

## THE MOTHER

Isaac, free from the torture of his mother's eyes, tore through the quiet woods to his distant hiding-place. He reached it in a fever of anxiety, and thrust his hand down into the hollow ; it struck against the bottles ; they were safe.

He laughed aloud. With considerable pains he had procured this store of spirits, buying it in the market-town, at a place where he was entirely unknown, carefully conveying it away and secreting it, a few bottles at a time. Not a soul in the village had ever seen him buy more than one dram ; certainly none would have thought the worse of him for doing so ; but his mother's peace of mind—his unique preoccupation—was safe. It mattered not, as he often most bitterly told himself, that some day he should become a notorious drunkard, such being his terrible, inevitable fate—if only the grave had first closed on the one heart that loved him ! Only so long, so long, O God !

He opened one of the bottles, and put it to his lips. Immediately he dropped it, spluttering. It contained nothing but water. The broken pieces lay on the ground. The dog crept up and licked them.

Isaac stood horror-stricken, trying to realize what this trickery meant. His secret was in the hands of the poachers.

He stood for a long while, but the whirlwind of his thoughts would not twist itself clear. The dog pushed up against him, whining. He stooped and patted it.

Already the dull November day was declining. Suddenly, in a shiver of searching wind, one thought arose before him, terribly distant. The night was coming—it was already there—and he hadn't a drop of drink !

## THE MOTHER

Then the drink-frenzy came upon him—the dread of the approaching craving, the agony of thirst. He shrieked aloud and fled straight across the forest to the hill-road, past the cottage, towards the village, towards the tavern, towards relief! The dog ran panting beside him.

By the time he reached the nearest houses in the twilight the lamps were coming out. The long haste, the increasing desire—these had strained every fibre of his being till he moaned as if in physical pain. He hurried along the deserted street to the public-house. At its door he stood gasping for a moment; then he entered, and, steadying his voice—

“ Good evening, Baas Picker—a dram ! ” he breathed.

A shout of laughter arose from a corner of the badly-lit room. Round a table, in the half-dark, amidst fumes of gin and petroleum, half a dozen choice spirits sat grouped.

The keeper turned and faced them with a violent effort at self-control.

“ Let me stand you a glass, Quint,” cried the voice of Tom Bunsing.

“ Thank you, I can pay for myself,” retorted Isaac, with difficulty suppressing his fury. He tossed down the liquor, and felt his brain steady itself. “ With honestly-got money,” he added.

“ You’ll want it to supply your cellar,” remarked another voice in the dusk.

“ Hist ! ” said an older man.

Isaac stood by the bar, yearning to tear himself away from the deepening disgrace.

“ Give me another,” he said. “ ’Tis a very damp night.”

## THE MOTHER

Another shout of merriment greeted the words.

"Why, keeper, you're unusually thirsty?" said the publican with a meaning smile.

The men in the corner sat watching.

"I say, Quint," called Tom Bunsing, "friends, you know—and no harm meant! But your mother had better keep a quiet tongue in her head."

"Hold yours," said Isaac.

The poacher jumped up with an oath, and came forward.

"One more," said Isaac, calmly, "then I'm off."

But nobody laughed this time. The men had gathered round.

"I tell you," began Bunsing, "your mother——"

"If you mention her again in this place, I'll knock you down," said the keeper, pushing back his empty glass.

The other laughed defiantly, though he stepped back a pace.

"Your mother——"

"Do you want any more?" questioned Isaac, as Tom Bunsing picked himself up.

"Look you, I'll have no fighting here," interposed the publican angrily. "Go outside, the whole lot of you, and, Tom, give him as good as you got!"

"I'll give him better—some day," said the crestfallen hero, rubbing his forehead.

But nobody moved.

"You can find me whenever you want to," retorted Isaac. "Here, Picker, put me up a bottle of gin! Here's the money."

They all stood watching the publican at work. Isaac pushed the bottle into the pocket of his pea-jacket.



## THE MOTHER

"Look here, you fellows," he said in a low, clear voice, "I—I'm an honest man. I've never done any of you an ill-turn. I'll fight any of you, if you wish it, though I don't know why. But no knives." He addressed himself to the older man. "Bost," he said, "make them see they must spare my mother! Don't—don't let it get to my mother! It's a good joke—a capital joke against me. But it'll keep. She's an old woman,"—his voice grew desperate—"don't let it go farther at present! Boys, think of your own—no, it's not the same. Here, do what you like with me, but don't let it get to her!"

The others stood aside, awkward, with evil grins. But Jan Bost stepped forward.

"There's not a soul in the country doesn't honour your mother, Quint. She's a good plucked one, and she got me two days in quod. Nobody'd have the heart or the courage to breathe a word against you in her presence. Here, shake hands, and go home."

The keeper retraced his steps with leaden heart. He chewed tobacco as he went to keep down the smell of the spirits. He must find a new hiding-place for his treasure. It was nearly nine when his mother opened the door.

"What a strange Sunday!" she said. "Where have you been?" Then, lest her words should seem to imply suspicion or reproach:

"Don't think I'm spying on you, Isaac. La! I know you're in love. But there, I dare say it's only my fancy. She's a sweet little girl, and a good." She set out his supper, carefully kept hot. "Not but what you ought to tell me, Isaac," she added with simple inconsistency. "I'm your mother, and I've a right to be

## THE MOTHER

told. Sometimes I think you're afraid to tell me, for fear I should mind or be jealous. Boy, surely you know me better than that ! ”

“ Indeed, mother, there's nothing,” he protested, pretending to eat.

She posted herself in front of him, squaring her arms. “ So you're not in love ? ” she said.

He had never lied to her point-blank. “ I told you before, I shall never marry,” he answered.

She laughed a happy little laugh. “ They all say that,” she said, “ a week or two before the courting. Very well, Isaac, only mind one thing. Don't let her mother know it's settled before I do ! ”

“ All right ! ” he answered. “ But if I promise that mother, you must promise me something too.”

“ All right,” said the magpie.

“ Well, what is it ? ” asked the widow, full of tranquil content.

“ That you will leave Tom Bunsing alone.”

“ Leave Tom Bunsing alone ! ” she repeated, and all the brightness went from her voice. “ Do you mean to say not tell Basset that I found him with two pheasants ? ”

“ Yes.”

The widow rested her hand on the table. “ My own son ask me to cheat our master ? ” she said.

“ No,” said Isaac clumsily. “ I'll tell them I let him off with a caution. They can't convict him on your story of the pheasants. Mother, I don't want to make him desperate. I'm afraid of him.”

“ Afraid ! ” she repeated, with a clear ring of scorn.

“ Afraid of your rival ? Oh ! Isaac, it's not that ; forgive me, dear. I understand. Nonsense, he won't

## THE MOTHER

hurt *me*, Isaac. Why, none of them's ever touched me all these years."

"Let him alone, mother. I'm the keeper. It's my business." The words rang louder than he knew.

"Isaac, you never spoke to me like that before!" Her quick eyes flashed.

"I don't want to speak wrong to you now. It isn't my fault if you meddle——"

"Silence!" She waited. "I am going to bed," she said, and passed out of the room.

### III

IN a few days the whole country-side—one solitary soul excepted—had learnt that the good-looking, respectable young keeper—Quint, old widow Quint's son, Isaac Quint—habitually took drink, in large quantities, on the sly. Now, the consumption of strong liquors, though perhaps hardly a thing to be proud of, was not either a subject for general disapproval or even remark; but the secrecy, the hoard, and especially the trick so successfully played on "the hypocrite," all these combined to heap contempt on his head. No one was angrier than Picker, the publican, who, considering himself cheated of legitimate profit, openly expressed his opinion that young Isaac had stolen the liquor he so carefully hid. This presumption the village rejected, but it accepted another, namely, that the keeper, whom nobody had ever seen drunk, must have accustomed himself to intemperance from his boyhood. For weeks, nay, for months, the detected delinquent lived in an atmosphere of angry derision. The long-dreaded dis-

## THE MOTHER

covery had come. He faced it, content, if but, on returning from his work in the evening, he read the still unchanged welcome upon his mother's face.

If !—*there* hung the daily, hourly suspense which made his life an unbroken terror. At any moment the blow might fall. His thoughts dwelt on it alone in the woods, at work amongst his comrades, whilst receiving orders at daybreak, whilst watching through the silence of the night. Even now perhaps, as he sat laughing at the joke in the loud tavern, the fatal word was being spoken in the cottage. If his mother talked apart with some neighbour he trembled. One evening, in the beginning of his torment, she chuckled suddenly over the little local paper—*Old Gossip* the country people called it. "Why, here's a capital story," she said. And she read aloud, sufficiently altered for printing, the tale of "The Tippler Tricked."

As she finished, he joined in her laugh.

"Ha, ha ! very funny ! " he said.

She peered over her spectacles. For one second his heart stood still. "Yes," she assented, "and serve him right, says I ! "

With the tact which is born only of infinite tenderness, he still studied to avoid betraying *himself*. In common with so many for whom the drink-craving is a disease, his body neither demanded nor easily developed intoxication. He never came home the worse for liquor, excepting late at night ; he was never at any time tipsy in the popular sense. In spite of his constant chewing tobacco, his mother, of course, occasionally noticed that he had taken a glass of spirits. She had never known a man who did not.

As the weeks went by, and the storms lulled without

## THE MOTHER

reaching the hill-top, some measure of tranquillity returned to Isaac's breast. After all, it was a fact of universal experience that evil rumours but rarely encountered the persons immediately concerned. Nobody, except a politician, has the faintest idea what is said of him by his foes or his friends. But for the scene in the tavern, Isaac himself might have doubted the truth. His master had never mentioned the subject. Only, once, the head keeper had bidden him, with a sneer, to look out.

So, Sunday after Sunday, the widow, in her stiffest of garments, walked to church on her tall son's arm. She noticed, indeed, that people stopped and stared after them, but people, especially women, had always done that. She smiled to herself. If she had met a young fellow like Isaac she also would have stopped and stared.

It was true, as Jan Bost had said, that her neighbours respected her respectability. Strong provocation would be required to do her a cruel and superfluous wrong. The man who most appreciated their forbearance loathed himself for requiring it. He had never yet fought against the curse which oppressed him as he fought during those first weeks while the whole world was mocking him. He must conquer now. For, when the truth crashed down upon her, as it inevitably some day would, and she arose, broken-hearted, to reproach him, then must he be able to answer that his guilt, if not his shame, was a thing of the past. He *must* conquer. For many weeks he fought with the energy of despair. And, despairing, fell.

Then even the last frail hope broke under him, and he let himself sink. There was no longer any reason

## THE MOTHER

for hiding his secret from any but his mother. He went openly to buy drink at the village tavern ; he stayed to consume it there. It was pleasant to drink in company and forget the horror at his heart. Far better than to pace the woods in the rainy winter nights. And some of the chaps at the tavern were not half bad if you got to know them. The circumstances of his mother's life had made her too unsociable. What was the use of never quitting the desolate hill, living like a weasel or an owl ? Tom Bunsing had capital stories—if he poached, it was from sheer love of danger, a feeling that even a keeper could understand. Isaac had never borne malice ; when Tom stepped up to him grinning and said, "Come, I owe you a dram, Quint !" the poor fellow accepted the offer with a laugh that sounded bright.

Meanwhile, the scandal of his intemperate habits having become a patent fact, the neighbourhood ceased to talk. But one Sabbath the minister, gazing down from the pulpit on mother and son, suddenly made up his mind to "take measures." The minister was an old man now, and he still believed himself a wise one.

"Petronella," he said on the Monday at dinner to the maiden sister who lived with him, "Isaac Quint must become a Blue Ribbonite. I shall walk over presently and tell his mother so."

"His mother ?" The sister looked up. "His mother ? Remember, James, his mother doesn't *know*."

"Amazing !" said the minister. "Yes, of course, I am aware ! She must be very blind."

"Love is blind," replied the little old lady, shaking her corkscrew curls, "in her case. And foreseeing, in

## THE MOTHER

his. How he must love her ! I cannot help watching them in church."

"Fie !" said the minister. "Not during the sermon, I hope ?"

"Could we but help them !" she continued. "Yes, we will go together. It will require a great deal of care."

"You !" exclaimed the minister. "It would certainly upset you ! You cannot walk half so far !"

She looked across at him and reflected.

"Yes, I can," she said. "Yes, I can. It is a fine afternoon. Let us go."

A few minutes later they started ; the frail little spinster held on bravely along the straight line of road.

The widow was feeding her pigs. Nothing disconcerted, she asked her visitors to sit down while she went to wash her hands.

"I am sure you're dead beat," said the Dominé, anxiously watching his sister.

"No, no," she answered faintly. "What a quiet spot it is ! Peace everywhere, even on the woman's face."

"Yes, she must be very lonely. Here she comes. Vrouw Quint, I have called to speak to you on a matter of importance. You have doubtless heard of the Blue Ribbon."

"No, Dominé," replied the widow ; "but there's so many advertisements nowadays."

"This isn't an advertisement. It's an association."

"For the Queen's birthday ?" said the widow.

"By no means." The Dominé spake with asperity.

"I beg pardon," replied the widow humbly. "I had heard something about a feast on the Queen's birthday. It must have been something else."

## THE MOTHER

"It was," said the Dominé. "The Blue Ribbon is an association for the suppression of drink. But I forgot. You know nothing of the evils caused by intemperance."

"I think I do," replied the widow softly, her mind reverting to that wintry morning when they had brought her husband home.

"H'm!"—the Dominé's sister glanced up at him.

"Oh, yes, of course. We all do. The curse of this country is the drink-devil. Quite true, Widow Quint. I am glad you take so sensible a view of the matter. You know what is meant by signing the pledge?"

"Promising never to touch a drop of spirits in one's life." The widow suppressed a yawn.

"Just so," said the Dominé, pleased. "It is a cause in which all of us can help. *You* must sign the pledge, Widow Quint!"

"I?" exclaimed the widow indignantly.

"You. As I also have done."

"You? Well, Dominé, I should never have thought it of you; but I suppose it began at college. My cousin in Utrecht do say as the drinking is dreadful at college. But, as for me, I can't think what you mean, Dominé! I never touched spirits in my life!"

She rose, her brown eyes aflame.

"That's the very sort we begin with," said the Dominé sweetly, quite unconscious of any aspersions on himself. "Nine-tenths of our members are young ladies of position who couldn't distinguish madeira from gin. That's the very sort of people we want, Widow Quint, to—to set an example. Now, your son—you must employ all your influence to make Isaac wear the Blue Ribbon."



## THE MOTHER

‘Never,’ said the widow, and sat down again.

The Dominé, who had been watching for his sister’s approval of his diplomacy, turned round with a jump.

“What do you mean, Dominé? I can’t think what you mean, sir! I don’t know if any one’s been calumniating Isaac: I defy them to their face!”

She suddenly grew calm again. “I beg your pardon,” she said. “There must be some mistake. The boy’s a well-behaved boy, as nobody knows better than I. And nobody can say that he drinks. Isaac!”

She ruffled her apron; her hands twitched.

“At least you cannot pretend that your son is a teetotaler,” protested the Dominé with almost a sneer.

“No, Dominé. Is anybody? I never met anybody that was. He takes his occasional glass of spirits, like all men; and his beer at meal-times, as I do. La! to think of my insulting Isaac by saying he ought to take the pledge!”

“But, dear Vrouw Quint, *I* never get drunk,” interposed the Dominé’s sister mildly; “yet I also have joined the association. We do so to protest against the habit of drinking!”

“Then that must be a fancy of ladies and gentlemen, miss; and of those I never pretended to know nothing. All I know is that the Dominé asks me to tell Isaac and the neighbours that I think he’s a drunkard. Isaac! Me! La! Dominé, please let’s talk of something else. Would you like, miss, to see my little brown pig?”

The Dominé had been moving uneasily on his chair. “There are moments, Petronella,” he began, “when we feel that silence would mean participation in guilt. At whatever cost to myself or to others, as pastor of this

## THE MOTHER

parish, it is my duty to take a paramount interest in the welfare of the people——”

“ Yes, quite true,” exclaimed Petronella in great agitation, “ and so let us look at the little brown pig.”

“ Pig ? There are no pigs like the human. Vrouw Quint, listen to me ! What I am going to reveal to you will cause you great pain. My good woman, I appeal to your courage, your Christian resignation. Your son has doubtless excellent qualities. But he also has faults.”

At this moment the Dominé, to hide his perturbation, paused and took snuff. Had he not done so, the widow's fate had been sealed. But the break gave her courage.

“ Mejuffrouw, may I speak ? ” she began timidly, with her hand to her fluttering breast. “ I know that Isaac is not perfect. Ask him if, in his youth, I did not punish him when he misbehaved. I could speak now of his shortcomings, but were that befitting in his mother ? Is it necessary that others should point out his vices to me—imaginary or not ? ” Once more she rose, with a noble gesture of command and appeal.

“ Come,” she said, “ let us go and see the little brown pig ? ”

“ All right,” said the magpie, who had listened attentively all through the interview.

“ Yes, let us go,” assented the old maid in a low voice. “ James, she is right ; let us leave her and her son to the mercy of God.”

“ I sometimes fancy, Petronella,” replied the minister testily, “ you believe that you are wiser than I.”

“ No, indeed, dear ; no, indeed. A great deal less wise. But——”

“ But what ? Well then, in Heaven's name, let us be going ! We've no time for sight-seeing. You'll be

## THE MOTHER

ill as it is, Petronella. I never ought to have allowed it. But you make me do whatever you please."

The widow, left alone, ran out for a breath of air. She felt as if she should suffocate; her heart beat against her ribs.

She had gone farther along the road than he knew, when she saw Christine Brodel in a small orchard, at some distance, picking up apples. She called out to her, and skirting the wood, ran across.

In her indignation she poured out the story of the visit. She appealed eagerly for sympathy to the silent figure beside her.

"Why, Christine, you're as taciturn as people say I am! Girl, what would you have said if the Dominé had told you that Isaac got drunk?"

The farmer's daughter fingered the apples in her apron. "I should have demanded proof," she replied slowly. "But the Dominé didn't say that—did he now, Vrouw Quint?"

"No, indeed," replied the widow. "Well, perhaps I'm over-sensitive. But to think of it—dear me! to think of it! It gave me such a turn!"

The girl peered into her face. "You aren't well," said Christine, with a warmth in which all her pent-up sympathy bubbled over. "You should see the doctor. You know you aren't well, Vrouw Quint."

"I'm well enough, but my heart isn't as strong as it used to be, and my breath is apt to catch. I wish Isaac were safely married. Girl, when he's not out in the woods at night he's watching your window—the young fool!"

"Did he tell you so?" cried Christine, her rosy cheeks aflame.

## THE MOTHER

"Tell me! No. Trust a mother to find out. Good-bye."

But the girl held her back. "Mother," she said earnestly, "you don't couple our names like that, do you?—please!"

Something in Christine's face struck alarm to the widow's heart: "What do you mean?" she said fiercely. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," answered Christine faintly. "It's all your fancy. Nothing's wrong: nothing's right."

"Pooh, you don't understand about sweethearting! So much the better. I know Isaac's in love. But perhaps it's not with you, child! Why should it be? La, la!" And the two women kissed.

Christine, left to her apples, finished the last heap with laggard steps and sad eyes. On her homeward way a few tear-drops stole into undue prominence. She had just dashed one back when, at a turn of the lane, she met Bunsing.

"I was waiting for you," said Tom. "I saw you kiss old Mother Quint! Now, don't look scared. There were two fields between us. See here, you don't mean to say that you stick to that brute of an Isaac?"

"No. How dare you speak to me like that? Let me pass!"

"Don't be silly, Christine. There's as good fish in the sea as ever drank too much of it. You know as well as I that my father 'll be only too glad to have me settle down at the farm. Give a fellow a chance!"

"Let me pass!" she repeated, furiously, "you — poacher, you!"

He dropped aside with an oath: "Yes, I'm a poacher," he said. "Let your keeper look out!" He slunk away,

## THE MOTHER

leaving her in a tremble of diversified feelings. One thing, however, she clearly understood—she could never marry the man she loved.

The widow meanwhile, true to her long-trying precept that work in God's woods was the best cure for worry, had undertaken a survey of the preserve which belonged to her son's especial care. She was longing, yet fearing, to meet him. The events of the morning had left a painful impression upon her. There had been something in the manner of those she had spoken to which filled her with unreasoned alarm. A vague dread of misfortune hung heavy in the air. She was furiously angry with the Dominé that he should have ventured to annoy her—her, John Quint's widow—with his superfluous talk about drink. Did she not nightly thank God that He had answered her prayers, that Isaac came home with steady step and steadily wished her "Good-night" ?

As she hastened on, walking off her irritation, her keen eyes—still so keen at a distance !—caught sight of a half-effaced footstep, which was certainly not Isaac's. She followed the direction in which it pointed. It led her down a slope, among brushwood, to a nearly dry little runnel, close by which, admirably hidden, she found a carefully spread net. Her eyes flashed with triumph. Immediately she began cutting it loose.

"Hillo !" called a voice from the other side. Tom Bunsing rose up among the brushwood. He had come straight from his interview with Christine to look after his net. "You leave that alone, you she-dragon !"

"I'm doing my duty to the Baron," intrepidly replied Widow Quint. "Go home to your poor mother, Tom Bunsing, and dry her tears !" He jumped across without answering. In the scuffle which ensued he soon

## THE MOTHER

gained possession of the net, upsetting the old woman on the bank. "I can't help it," he said. "Why do you interfere, you hateful old thing, with what isn't your business? Do get away home."

She picked herself up. "Keep your net," she said scornfully. "I don't need it. I've got the other, just like it; I found it a week ago. All I wanted was full proof they were yours. To-morrow I lay the whole case before the head-keeper. You'll spend the next month or two in jail."

Tom Bunsing's dark face turned pale. He swore a great oath. He had never been caught before. He had never dreamed of imprisonment.

When he spoke again his voice was quite calm. "Look here," he said, "I'll go back with you to your cottage, Vrouw Quint, and you'll hand me over that net."

"I shall not," said the widow, rising to depart.

"Then I shall go and fetch it. Isaac is down at the village, doing some work for the Baron. I knew he was, or I should not have come here."

The widow faced her antagonist with a confident smile. "You won't find the net in the cottage," she said; "for 'tis hidden in the woods."

"In Isaac's oak!" exclaimed Tom.

"What—what do you mean?"

"In Isaac's oak, where he hides his—oh, hang you, Vrouw Quint! Don't you hurt my mother, and I won't hurt your son."

"Hurt my son? How can you hurt Isaac? What does Isaac hide in the oak?"

"Never you mind. Where did you hide my net?"

"Tom Bunsing, I can't—I can't. What do you know of my son?"

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"No more than of my net. Look here. I'll give you until nightfall—no, I'll give you until eight o'clock. If by that time the net isn't back in the place that you took it from, then——"

"Well?"

"The worse it will be for you."

"Pooh!"

"And for Isaac."

"Tom Bunsing, what harm can you do Isaac?"

"Till eight o'clock, mind you—not ten minutes later. I won't—do you hear me? I *won't* go to prison—for the sake of the old folks at home, who wouldn't stand it. Be careful. 'Tis ill fighting with a desperate man." He turned and disappeared into the underwood, without waiting for another word.

Vrouw Quint retraced her steps homewards. She was very anxious and very tired. Something, surely, must be wrong with Isaac. It could not be anything serious. Still, young men were not saints: she had never expected him to prove perfect. Again, she had unpleasant visions of imprudent lovemaking. Or could he, once in a way, have lost money at cards? No, what about the oak? What had he hidden from the others—from her?

As she drew nigh to the cottage, she saw that a figure was standing by the door. Presently she recognized the carrier, John Bost.

"I have a message for you from Isaac," said John. "I promised to take it: I didn't dream you'd be out. Woman, how ill you're looking! Go in and sit down."

"What is it?" she gasped.

"The Baron and Baroness have gone to spend the day at Roodwell with the Baron's brother; they've

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taken Isaac with them, to see about some pigeons. He'll be back about eight."

This was terrible news to the widow. She sat thinking, her hands clasped tight on the knobs of her chair. "John Bost, you've got your cart here," she began. "You must drive across to Roodwell with a note from me to Isaac."

"You're a cool 'un!" replied John. "A note! Is it to ask the Baroness to come back with him to supper?" She looked up at him, and his voice fell. "I can do it," he said; "'taint much out of my way. But make haste."

She went to her father's bureau, and laboriously indited the following epistle—

"DEAR ISAAC,—You must speak to the Baron and to Basset immediately. The *thing* must be done at eight o'clock to-night, in the Hillside Woods. I have everything ready. Come home to supper. Come as quick as you can.

"YOUR MOTHER."

She enclosed this in an envelope and gave it to the carrier. Supposing he opened the letter and betrayed her? No, people never did such sort of things outside the newspapers. Besides, she had no choice. "You're an honest man, John," she said, "I know. I'll give you a five-penny bit."

"Hang your five-penny bit," replied John, and walked out of the cottage.

She stood uncertain for a moment, then she ran after him and called him back.

"John, John, listen! Answer me one thing before



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you go. The Dominé—has he ever asked you to take the Blue Ribbon, John ? ”

John Bost stared hard into the old woman's face. “ Asked me ! ” he said cheerily. “ Dozens of times. Whom doesn't he ask ? Why, the Baron wears one—and the Baroness too ! ”

“ No, I've never seen that,” objected the widow.

“ Well, anyhow, he's made them teetotalers,” replied John, a bit disconcerted.

“ Thank you ! Thank you ! ” the widow cried fervently. “ Never mind me, John. See that Isaac gets my letter. Good day ! ”

“ So it's that,” said the carrier to himself, gazing down at the envelope. “ Poor old woman, she don't look like living much longer, but, if she does, she's bound to find out.”

The widow, back in her armchair, broke into joyful and angry tears—tears that were wrath with herself for the moment's brief doubt of her boy.

He would understand her message, for although she rarely referred to the subject, he knew that she was preparing with Basset the arrest of Tom Bunsing, as soon as they had proof of his guilt. She admired Isaac's refusal to take any steps against his rival ; it was like the nobility of his character. But she must concert measures where he naturally held aloof. The very delicacy of his position made it doubly incumbent on her to do her duty to their master. It was this feeling which had left her no rest. “ I won't plot anything extra against Tom,” had said Isaac. “ If he comes in my way, the worse for him.” He added to himself, “ and for me.”

The evening began to fall, and the widow, having

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peeled her potatoes, sat waiting for Isaac's return ; waiting, wondering what was going to happen, not speculating overmuch, resolved to do her duty to the Baron, whatever might befall. The dog, after unappreciated attempts to push his nose between her fingers, had curled himself to sleep against her skirt. The magpie occasionally annoyed her with his futile "All right !"

Supper-time crept by without bringing Isaac. The cuckoo called the hour of seven and half-past. Then she could bear the suspense no longer. She went out into the dark night, and, exhausted as she was, began walking along the road to meet him. Suddenly a dumb anxiety increased upon her, the fear of a catastrophe drawing nigh. She felt that she must speak to some human being, hear some human voice. She toiled down to the turnpike by the high-road ; she would hear there if any one had passed.

"Yes," said Katey, "the Baron had driven over to Roodwell, in the brougham, with Isaac on the box, beside the coachman. The Baron would be coming back presently ; they never were late. But Isaac had returned on foot—why, a couple of hours ago ! He had struck off into the woods ; had he not yet been home ?"

"The woods !" repeated the widow. "Katey, had he his gun ?"

"No, he had not," replied the turnpike woman. "I particularly noticed that. For I said to myself, he ought to take his gun of nights. Don't we all know Tom Bunsing has said that he'd do for him."

"Tom Bunsing do for him !" repeated the widow.

"Yes, neighbour, and I don't hold with those that think you ought to know nothing about your son's

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doings, nothing at all! Some things there may be—but there——”

“What things?” cried the widow. “There can be none.”

“There, there! But surely you know Isaac and Bunsing are both sweet on Christine?”

“I know nothing for certain of either.”

“Well, well! Tom’s a desperate character, and I say that Isaac had better be careful.”

“Nonsense,” said the widow; “he’s gone up into the woods to meet Basset.”

“That he hasn’t, for Basset went by with two wagons of faggots, ten minutes ago—to the village,”

The widow clutched at her breast. All further doubt was impossible. Between Isaac and Tom Bunsing there existed some secret link of shame. Instead of obeying his mother’s message, the keeper had gone up alone, to warn the poacher or to defy him. Even now, perhaps, they were contending in the darkness of the forest, her son and the man she had threatened. “Don’t drive me desperate, I too have a mother. Don’t drive me desperate,” Tom Bunsing had said.

“How late is it?” she asked wildly.

“Near eight o’clock.”

“No, no, your clock’s always much too slow. ’Tis more like a quarter past!”

“Well,” said the turnpike woman apologetically, “the clock certainly ain’t particular about a few minutes here nor there. Still, I don’t think——”

From the far dark of the woodlands a faint report of firearms rang out clear across the night.

“Hark, what’s that?” exclaimed Katey.

But the widow was running along towards the spot

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where the hill road branched off from the highway. "Isaac! Isaac!" she cried stupidly—"Isaac!"

She stood still, panting: her leaden limbs refused to carry her farther; a great sickness and oppression weighed upon her chest. "Isaac!"—the wide expanse of her beloved woods stretched merciless before her, away into the blackness of the silent winter evening; with a terrible distinctness she saw him lying motionless, stretched on the turf beneath the ghastly grimness of the trees.

As she stood gazing, helplessly, the high horizon seemed to lighten: in another moment a paleness spread across it, then, slowly, a pink and purple glow. The woods above the cottage, near the hill-top, were on fire.

Still she stood gazing, helplessly. The conflagration increased with solemn, far-away stateliness, gradually spreading and filling the east. Now, doubtless, the cottage was burning—the animals! What had happened? What had happened to her son?

She sank on her knees. "O God!" she screamed—"O God! O God!"

A carriage was coming along the high road at a furious pace. She lifted herself up. The Baron, hurrying home. For an instant the thought flashed across her dizzy brain that blind old Katey might possibly have been mistaken! Perhaps she should see Isaac sitting safe beside the coachman! "Stop," she cried, running to meet the horses—"stop!"

The coachman, alone on the box, drew up with a pull. Amidst the clatter of the horses and the harness, the Baron's voice was heard at the window. "Oh, Mynheer the Baron!—the forest—Isaac—Isaac—the cottage——" was all that the widow could articulate.

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"How? Isaac?" exclaimed the Baroness. The Baron opened the carriage door. "Come in here, Widow Quint," he said; "there is room on the little seat. Quick we've no time to lose. We are hastening to the village for help!"

As the carriage flew on through the darkness, the widow, growing gradually somewhat calmer, found breath enough to gasp out her suspicions and her fears. In broken accents she told of Tom Bunsing's misconduct and his threats. "And if harm has befallen Isaac—as surely it has—the fault, Mynheer the Baron, is mine!"

She burst out weeping. The old couple had listened in anxious sympathy.

"Yes, weep," said the Baroness, gently, taking the widow's hand.

"Fault?" repeated the old man. "Nay, that is not the word. You have acted nobly, in accordance with your whole righteous life." Both of them silently admitted that her fear was well-founded. It would not be the first time, nor the second, that woods had been fired to conceal a poacher's crime.

The Baron sighed. "Nothing is certain yet," he said. "Isaac has always been an admirable son to you; no wonder you are anxious about him. But he is probably alive and well!"

"Oh, Mynheer—oh, Mevrouw, he is all in all to me," said the widow. "Since the day of his birth he has been my daily glory! Never mother had a nobler son!"

"Well, we shall know in another minute," said the Baron.

The carriage was rattling along the village street.

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The street was full of hurry and voices. Suddenly the horses stopped.

"There is Basset," cried the Baron. "Hi! Basset—how about Isaac Quint? Is he safe?"

"Safe enough!" came the keeper's excited reply. "No fear of his being up in the woods, Mynheer the Baron! The drunken sot's here in the tavern—too drunk to move!"

With a shriek which rang over the rumbling of the fire-engine, the widow sprang out of the shelter of the carriage.

"Mynheer the Baron, he lies—he lies!" she cried, and ran into the public house. The others followed her.

On a bench, up against the wall, sat Isaac, staring stupidly, trying to collect his senses. Half a dozen other men, including Tom Bunsing, were gathered beside him, near a table covered with glasses.

At sight of his mother, sick and distraught, the young keeper's eyes seemed to clear, and he steadied himself against the whitewashed wall.

"Merciful God! what has happened?" cried the widow.

Isaac did not answer. He was trying to remember. When his mother's message had reached him, he had asked the Baron's immediate permission to depart, but, instead of consulting with the head-keeper, he had hurried to the woods to look for Bunsing and secure his silence. He had found the poacher there, and had learned his ultimatum: restitution of the net before eight o'clock, or betrayal of the secret to the widow. In vain Isaac had pleaded his powerlessness; Tom Bunsing, equally desperate, had answered with the in-

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formation, strangely new to the sufferer's son, that Vrouw Quint had acknowledged a heart complaint to Katey, who had whispered the news to Vrouw Brodel at the farm. "And a sudden shock may kill her," said Tom Bunsing knowingly. Isaac, conscious that any appeal to his mother would prove worse than useless, had broken down utterly, had implored the other to delay at least until the morning, had finally rushed away, through brake and brushwood, to end his miseries at the tavern in drink. Tom Bunsing, left alone near the spot where he knew the evidence of his guilt must lie hidden, had set fire to a pile of dry twigs which lay dangerously near to his hand. Then he too had fled, emptying his pouch that no cartridges might be found upon him—hence the report—had fled across country to the tavern, where all men would see him. This warning was enough for him; he would never poach again.

"I'm all right—all right," said Isaac.

"Isaac, how came you drunk?" faltered his mother. "Why didn't you warn Basset? Why is Tom Bunsing here? Don't you know the woods are on fire?"

"The woods on fire!" cried Isaac, starting up and reeling. "So they were saying. I thought they were joking!" He turned, searching for some one. "Here, Bunsing, *you* did that!"

"Yes, *you* did that!" echoed the widow, gasping, and sinking back. Strong arms seized her, and drew her into a chair. "Mynheer the Baron, he did it! Tom Bunsing—the poacher!"

"Did I?" exclaimed Tom, "or did Isaac Quint, the drunken keeper?—Isaac Quint, who gets drunk in the woods every night, and keeps bottles of spirits in the hollow trees up yonder?—Quint, the drunkenest

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drunkard in the village, as everybody standing here knows, except his old fool of a mother ! ”

“ Silence ! ” said the Baron in a terrible voice.

The widow stared up at the faces around her, and read acquiescence in them all. The vague dangers and threatenings which all day had muttered around her condensed into definite shape. A look came into her eyes, as they looked on her son, which none that saw it has ever forgotten. Her head bent ; she fell forward in a heap on the floor.

They lifted her immediately, and the doctor, coming to the front—for the whole village was assembled in or near the tavern—tried to do what little could be done. With a cry whose echo seemed unending in the silence, Isaac had sunk upon his knees beside the body.

The police were in the room, putting back the crowd. Outside, the rustic firemen were continuing their futile preparations. The distant heaven was ablaze with light.

The doctor desisted, with a shrug of the shoulders.

“ Arrest these two men,” said the police-inspector softly.

Isaac held out both arms to the handcuffs, and over the set anguish of his face swept a gleam that was almost of hope.



## The Summer Christmas

**I**T is an old story, forgotten long ago, I think, in that quiet corner of the world which saw it happen. A touching story it has always seemed to me, and strangely quaint ; but that, perhaps, may only be because to me its memory remains indissolubly blended with recollections of the place in which I used to hear it told me, because the soft voice of the teller must ever be to me the music of the tale. For me alone is this : why should I seek, then, to intrude it upon others ? To them it will be a passing incident, printed, paid for (a tenth part of a sixpence), sliced between two others, yawned over for five minutes, and forgot. But to me it is the changeless Nowel, the young anthem of the angels around the cradle of the Saviour of the world. And again I hear my mother speaking, in the wainscot chamber with the painted panels, in the half light of the fire-logs and her face, hear her telling, with a voice like distant church-bells, all the story, how it happened, with but little alteration, many winter evenings, almost word for word. The voice is stilled. The winter evenings were long and cold and dark. They are longer now.

I said the story is an old one. That must be true. For one thing, there are no Counts Edelstam in Holland now ; the family has died out, and the simple customs

## THE SUMMER CHRISTMAS

among which they lived are also dead or dying. All this I know. Yet to me the story is so fresh and new it might occur to-morrow. The oldest thing in a man's life (and they say it is the last) is the memory of his mother—daughters may forget: however that be, thank God! to this eternal soul—a-flutter round the flame betwixt two shadows—come some few thoughts that remain untinged by time.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was on a winter evening that Magda von Malitz arrived at Stamsel—a bitter winter evening, cold and dark as this. The old Count had been expecting her since sunset. The carriage, sent to meet her at the post-house, should have brought her back three hours ago. He sat in the wainscot chamber, where the painted panels are, wondering if some accident could possibly have befallen the horses. The suggestion troubled him—He rang for Peter.

"Peter, do you think that anything can have happened to—the young Baroness?"

"I do not think so, Mynheer the Count."

"And why not, pray?" asked the old gentleman testily.

"Oh! if you wish it, of course, Mynheer the Count."

Count Edelstam took snuff. He used to be a long time about taking snuff.

"Travelling is not so dangerous——" began the old servant, who never spoke unless spoken to, except when he thought he had gone too far.

"*What?*" His master stopped, amazed, with up-lifted pinch.

"As it used to be, I was going to say."

"That is true. Now, when I went to Paris"—the

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old gentleman snuffed, shook his head and waited—"yet that was before the Revolution!" He presented his mull to the servant, a thing he never did by daylight.

"Your Nobleness could not go now," said Peter.

"Peter, you presume. Mind your own business," replied the Count with vivacity. For that subject was a sore one, as will readily appear.

"Still I wish she had arrived," said the Count.

"So she has," said the servant.

"What on earth do you mean?" said the Count.

"I hear the carriage in the courtyard," said the servant.

"Then why the devil can't you speak?" said the Count.

"I did not wish to presume," said the servant.

"You are the curse of my life," exclaimed the Count, running out into the hall.

"And its blessing," said, preparing to follow, the servant.

Magda von Malitz was being ushered up the marble steps from the great doorway. She was very young, with a lot of fair hair, and big blue eyes. She must have looked charming under her travelling-hood.

She dropped a deep curtsey to the stately old gentleman, her uncle, in the cloud of white hair (was it powdered?) and splendid lace ruff. He took her by the hand with a few words of greeting, and led her into the parlour.

"You are like your mother," he said, lifting the lampshade to gaze at her. "Why did she go all the way to Austria? It is too far."

"The foot goes where the heart leads it, my uncle," said Magda, and dropped another curtsey.

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"Tut, tut. Well, she died there ; it is seven years ago."

"Eight years, my uncle," said Magda.

"Tut, tut. You mustn't contradict me. Nobody contradicts me here."

Magda dropped another deep curtsey. There must lie little satisfaction, she reflected, in pretending to be right. But she only said—

"And where is my Uncle Robert, Uncle Charles ?"

"Your Uncle Robert is away," replied Uncle Charles. And he coughed a great deal, and cleared his throat, and choked.

"Away ?"

"And why not, pray ?" said the old gentleman sharply.

"My mother has told me you always lived together, that was all," she answered, with eyes full of innocent surprise ; "six months here at Stamsel, six months at Bardwyk, four miles off."

"It is four and a half," said Count Edelstam.

"And she had never known you two days apart. I have often heard her say that. When, please, is he coming back ?"

"You ask too many questions, my niece," replied the Count. "You are a stranger here. You could ask questions for ever. My housekeeper will show you to your apartment. After that, pray come down and have some supper."

"Forgive me," she said, "I hardly feel myself a stranger. I used to hear about you and Uncle Robert every day while mother was alive."

He solemnly kissed her on the forehead.

"You will be happy here, I trust," he said. "We

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will do everything to make you happy. It is a quiet place, but so is Bardwyk ; and neither of them is quieter than your convent of Plauensee."

"I am happy to be rid of school. I am happy to be here," said Magda, departing under care of Vrouw Slomp.

The old Count turned abruptly to his servant. "Now that is very strange, is it not ?" he said, "that she should begin by asking after Robert."

"Not so very strange, if your Nobleness comes to consider. Evidently the young lady knows more of what happened before than of what has occurred in the last six years."

"Well, go and live with my brother Robert," replied Count Charles inconsequently.

"As your Nobleness pleases. Shall I send you my brother Paul ?"

The one old man looked in the other's imperturbable face. Then they both had snuff ; and while they were enjoying it, Magda came back. Her hair was all about her brow in curls and ringlets ; her dark frock, high-waisted, after the fashion of the period, suited the trimness of her graceful figure. She was all dimples and sweetness and smiles.

"Now to prove that I am no stranger," she said gaily, "I will tell you about that snuff-box, Uncle Charles, which you have got in your hand. It has a stag chased on top of it, silver-gilt, with two rubies for eyes."

"Dear, dear, it is time you came home," he said, laughing. "Yet, my dear, you were never in the Netherlands before."

"Still, they are home," she answered gravely. "I never knew my Austrian father : my mother has been dead so long. Brabant has always seemed my father-

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land ; mother wished me to think so. She never tired of telling me about her life before her marriage. Uncle Charles, I was so sorry you could not have me a month earlier, before Christmas. I should have liked, above all things, to be present at the ' Peace-making.' I had been looking forward to it. Of course my Uncle Robert was here for that ? ”

“ My dear, I must go and wash my hands for supper,” said Uncle Charles, and he hastily beat a retreat. From one of the panel-chamber's many gloomy corners old Peter came forward into the shaded light.

“ Young Freule,” he said, “ you will excuse me, but the name of your Uncle Robert is never mentioned in this house.”

“ Why, Peter,” cried the girl, “ whatever do you mean ? And where is Paul ? ”

“ Paul, an 't please your Nobleness, has gone with Count Robert to Bardwyk ; they live there always now. Six years ago our masters quarrelled : they have never met or spoken since.”

“ Quarrelled ? ”

“ It came on about a journey—quite unexpectedly, as one may say. They had always been the best of friends, though very different characters. My master is quick and kind-hearted. Count Robert is slow—but la ! he's kind-hearted too.”

“ I know,” said the girl impatiently ; “ but the quarrel ! What quarrel ? ”

Old Peter peered out of his little grey eyes. “ Your Nobleness knows a deal,” he said. “ They'd been planning their journey for months, but they always squabbled over it. Count Robert, he wanted to go to Paris ; he'd never been out of the country at all. Count

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Karel had been, as a young man, with me, thirty-nine years ago come next June, and he wouldn't go again, for the one place he'd been to was Paris. La! what a time we had in Paris! It was just before the outbreak of the great Revolution; 'tis a wonder I'm here to tell the tale!" That was Peter's stereotyped expression at this stage of his story. You were now expected to request further details.

"They quarrelled!" said the Freule, speaking as in a dream.

Peter knit his bushy eyebrows. "After what we had gone through, I cannot be surprised at my master's decision," he said.

"But there was no revolution six years ago in Paris! Revolutions are done."

"There might have been," said Peter emphatically; "any time. The people that did what the French did in '89—do you know what they did to the Dauphin?"

"Yes," said the girl softly.

"Dear, dear, they shouldn't teach young ladies such things. And to thousands of innocent women! No wonder Count Karel will never go to Paris again. No, *he* wanted to visit London! Count Robert refused to hear of London, because the English have taken the Cape of Good Hope."

"That, also, I can understand," remarked Magda.

"They had frequently quarrelled about the matter, amicably, as we fancied, but one evening, suddenly, they grew violent. They were rude to each other." Old Peter's voice dropped to a whisper. "Words fell between them—in fact, in the presence of us servants, they called each other names. I should not tell you, but that it is necessary you should understand. It is not

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the quarrel, it is *that* which one cannot forgive the other. Each refused to apologize ; both were in fault. Count Robert left for Bardwyk that night with my brother. There has been no communication between the two houses since."

" But the Peace-making ! " cried Magda, the tears in her eyes. " Surely they must meet at the Peace-making ! "

" Hush ! I hear my master's step ! Neither has been present at the Peace-making, Freule, since the Christmas before the quarrel ! "

At this juncture Count Karel entered, and, offering his hand, led Magda to the supper-table. The soft light of the candles fell from massive candlesticks : there were glittering glass and snowy napery and simple fare. They ate almost in silence, with formal question and answer about the journey. It was only when the oranges and walnuts were put on the table that Count Karel said what he wanted to say.

" It has been arranged," he began, looking down on the crackers he was carefully adjusting, " that you will spend six months of the year with me and six at Bardwyk. I shall ask you to leave for Bardwyk on the 31st of June. Meanwhile, please let us avoid the subject."

She laid her head upon the table-cloth and sobbed.

" Don't," said Count Karel ; his voice trembled.

" I—I can't help it. Please forgive me. It is so different from the home-coming I had expected."

" You cannot miss anything. You had never seen either of us, Magda ! "

" I—I know. But I have loved you both ever since I can remember. Mother taught me to. And she said your love for each other was the blessing of the neigh-



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bourhood. It had taught you to institute the Peacemaking——”

“Silence!” said Count Karel in a voice of thunder. Its tones rang through the lonely house. Old Peter crept up anxiously and peeped through the door.

That was the end of Magda’s first evening at Stamsel. Many days and evenings followed—cold, quiet, comfortable, uniformly dull. At least they got dull when she realized their uniformity. A silence hung over the house—a beautiful old house, full of art-treasures, many of the present lord’s collecting. Everything was in absolute order under Peter’s most absolute rule. The housekeeper was a nonentity. Magda was a guest. In the clockwork machinery of the house no hitches occurred except such as the master occasionally provoked. Count Karel’s temper was quick. He believed in, although he detested, scolding. He even scolded Peter. Peter ruled him with a rod of iron.

“The house is silent,” said Magda ruefully. She obtained, by not asking for it, permission to drive over to Bardwyk from time to time. The latter was a smaller edifice, a tiny castle, still more valuably furnished, not with art-curios, but with beautiful sixteenth-century furniture in its original place. Nothing much lay between the two properties but a stretch of bleak Brabant country, dotted over with stunted trees. Connected with each place was a ragged village: here and there a stray house lay lost. Half-way stood the church, in almost desolate loneliness, with the dwelling-house of the priest.

And so Magda got to know her Uncle Robert. He very much resembled his elder brother, but in a quieter way: there was not the eagle flash of the eye: there was

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a stronger, squarer chin. Count Robert was a book-worm, perfectly content among county histories, local and provincial and famil~~ies~~ chronicles, oddities and quiddities, notes and queries, intellectual parings and fringes, and rubbish of every sort. He liked his niece to sit by him, working tapestry. "But I miss my billiards!" he exclaimed one day, suddenly, looking up from van Leeuwen's *Batavia Illustrata*. She did not ask him to explain the "but," or the aggressive denial in his tone. "Do you play billiards, Magda?"

"No, Uncle Robert: they did not teach us in the convent," replied Magda demurely, bending over her work.

"My dear, they were very right. When you come here you must learn to play at billiards, and also at backgammon."

"Uncle Charles and I play backgammon of evenings," said Magda. "He plays beautifully."

"H'm—but not with proper caution. Backgammon, of all games, requires caution."

"Does it?"

"I shall prove to you that it does when we play together. My dear, it wants a long time till the 31st of June."

"This is the 17th of April," was Magda's only answer.

His pride prevented his asking her whether she looked forward to the transmigration, yet he would have given a good deal to know.

"It is time for me to go home," said Magda. That final word invariably annoyed him. But he quietly rang the bell and asked for the Freule's carriage.

Old Paul stood in the doorway, a stouter replica of Peter, with a redder nose and whiter hair.

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"An't please your Nobleness," said Paul, "Thys cannot drive the Freule back to-night." Thys was the Stamsel coachman.

"It does not please my Nobleness at all," replied Count Robert. "Pray, what is the matter with Thys?"

"Thys has been suddenly taken ill," said Paul, with a grin and a side glance towards the Freule.

"Drunk, of course," said the Count with quiet triumph.

"An't please your Nobleness, no," said Paul, with still greater satisfaction.

"Then what is the matter? Out with it!"

"I hardly like to tell before the Freule," said Paul, with beaming face and fidgety feet. "I am not at all sure that the Freule will approve. But to speak the truth, Mynheer the Count, there's been a fight between Thys of Stamsel and one of our Bardwyk men, and Thys has been beaten all to pieces."

"Which of our men?" asked old Count Robert, buried in *Batavia Illustrata*.

"Red-headed Joris, the stable-boy."

"The rogue ought to be ashamed of himself." Count Robert's head suddenly emerged from the book. "You will not give him a gold piece, Paul; do you hear? I will not have it."

Magda had risen. "No one need ask what the quarrel was about," she said sadly.

"My dear, it is only natural that servants should stick up for their masters."

"And the masters?" She looked him full in the face. His eyes fell. "I can drive myself home to-night," she said. "But I very much fear this will prevent my ever coming again."

Her uncle followed her. "You can have a boy from

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here," he said. "Magda, listen. You are right. Tell your uncle that I much regret this incident, and that Thys (whom I have always liked, but that is neither here nor there) shall have every care and comfort. Nothing more, child—do you hear? and nothing less. Good-night!"

She drove back with an exultant Bardwyk boy behind her. Her heart, by nature light, was very heavy. At the pastorage-house, half-way, she paused, and going in, sat down by the old priest's side.

"You love them as much as I," she said.

"Boy and man," replied the old priest meekly, "I have known them fifty years."

"How long ago is it, reverend father, that they instituted the 'Peace-making'? Tell me all about it; you have never told me before."

"Child, I think I have told you everything. It was twenty years ago, when your mother, who was so much younger than they, married and went to live in Austria. Your mother, as you know, did not marry early; she had long kept house for them. When she was gone, they said—and I think they were right—there seemed to be many more fights and squabbles among the people. We Brabanders are always a quarrelsome race, at Kermesses and feasts and funerals, and we love a law contention or a long-drawn family feud. Your mother—God rest her gentle presence—had somehow been a Messenger of Peace. She would go into the cottages and bid the men—and the women!—shake hands. Then, when she was gone, and the fights and contentions grew continuous, your uncle and myself—yes, my dear, I had a share in it [he smiled]—we started the Christmas Peace-making. Once a year, at the Holy Feast of

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Peace and Goodwill, after the Midnight Mass of the Nativity, we hold a little special service, full of 'Blessed are the Peace-makers,' and we sing the Angels' Song. It is very short and simple. The Bishop gladly gave permission. And then, ere it is over, they who will shake hands before the altar: some I call by name; with many I have spoken previously; with some I reason, even on the altar-steps. Ah, my dear, it used to be a beautiful service"—the old man sighed heavily—"shedding an especial glory over our Christmastide."

"But it still takes place!"

Father Cordes sighed again. "It still takes place. What will you have? The manorial pew stands empty on that day. On all other occasions Count Robert goes to a strange church, across the moor! The whole countryside knows of the quarrel. The influence of your uncles is gone. On more than one occasion in former years Count Karel, rising in his seat, has *commanded* some resolute wrong-doer to make atonement. And now? Let quarrel who quarrel will. Their masters hate each other. Fathful Thys of Stamsel lies at Bardwyk with a broken head." Tears came into the old priest's voice.

"I have done what I could," he said presently; "I have reasoned, I have pleaded. God alone can touch hearts. I am growing very feeble. Freule, my earthly pilgrimage is nearly over. I often feel that I could die in peace if I could see my masters reconciled."

"You will see them reconciled," said Magda suddenly.

"God grant it." She rose.

"Ask him. Ask Him often," she said.

"I have asked Him every day."

"Then how can it not happen? But ask that it may

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happen now, dear father, before another Christmas comes."

"It must, if I am to see it—on earth," said the father thoughtfully.

She left him without another word, for she could not have spoken it.

Count Karel was fortunately inclined to take a favourable view of the affray. His natural sweetness came to his assistance, for he was one of those people who are permanently sorry they have taken offence. So he waited till the assurance that his coachman's injuries were anything but dangerous (and honestly earned), and then he even went so far as to smile. "Give the boy from Bardwyk a pot of beer," he said to Peter, "and see that he has some food before he goes back." He turned in the doorway. "What boy is it?" he added.

"One of Kotter's, the gamekeeper's, Mynheer the Count."

"Well, that's a good litter. I'm glad Count Robert has taken him on. But, my dear Magda, I should say you had better give up going across for the present."

"In all things, dear uncle, I shall do as you think fit."

It took Robert three weeks to write and ask if his niece might pay him another visit. He would not apply direct to her, that being contrary to his ideas of etiquette; so at last he sent a note: "Count Robert presents his compliments to Count Karel," his logical mind forbidding him to use the phrase "Dear Brother." When she came, "I have missed you *very* much," he said, and sat and read his folio for the rest of the afternoon.

Driving along the untidy road, between the scraggy poplars, she came across the doctor; and she stopped

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to inquire after Father Cordes, who seemed more feeble than ever of late.

"What will you have?" said the doctor coolly. "The man is nearly eighty. He will live through the summer, I should say; but in any case the autumn damps will kill him."

"That is very sad," remarked the Freule.

"Sad? If you saw what I see in one day, young lady, you would alter your ideas of grief."

"I was thinking of something else," replied the girl, to the doctor's annoyance, and she drove on through the mild May dampness, with grey thoughts in the gathering grey.

"Your uncle is well, I presume?" said Count Karel, when they met at the five-o'clock dinner.

"He had a cold."

"He was always subject to colds. He does not pay proper attention to draughts. I merely inquire because, unless his health is equal to the exertion, you could not go to stay with him, dear Magda, in June."

"Do you find me very exhausting?" inquired Magda with a smile.

"I? Far from it. But a guest in a little household like Robert's must cause considerable commotion. Peter manages everything admirably: I should hardly have the same confidence in Paul. And Robert is a bookworm. My dear, if I thought you would not be quite comfortable there, I should not allow you to go." He looked across anxiously: this reflection had frequently been troubling him of late.

"Dear uncle, let us go there together," she said, trembling. He did not answer at all, but in the middle of dinner, in his nervousness, took snuff.

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"I met the doctor," she began presently, unable to bear the silence any longer. "He says that Father Cordes cannot live through the autumn."

"Doctors always say that," replied Count Karel incessantly. But his mouth twitched.

"He certainly is very old and feeble."

"I shall go and see him to-morrow, and tell him about my vinery. I am in hopes he will have, this year again, a bunch of grapes on the longest day." Count Karel spoke with unconcealed vaingloriousness; in those days that was a great achievement. Count Karel loved his green-house.

Next morning he went and told the priest, and the old man answered: "Count Karel, I thank you kindly. But oh, 'tis a branch of olive you should bring me first of all." The Lord of the Manor walked home in a rage, but several days elapsed before he remarked to Magda: "Yes, undoubtedly, Father Cordes is not very well just now. It is probably a passing indisposition."

"Poor, dear old man," said Magda.

"He is not so very old. He is not yet eighty." A long pause. "True, you are eighteen."

"Uncle, supposing the doctor were right? Supposing the father were not to get better." Magda stood looking out of the window. "Supposing he were to meet my mother, and—and—uncle, my mother never *knew*."

"How dare you?" exclaimed Count Karel, and walked out of the room.

"You are right in so far," said Count Robert two days later. "I have much respect for your judgment, Magda; for a woman's it is singularly sound. My brother has never sufficiently considered the importance



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of even your least significant actions, with an eye to the peasantry around. It is a mistake I have often pointed out to him, when we were—in the habit of conversing. Now this subject you have occasionally referred to, of our living together or separately—in itself it is a matter of slight signification (we have two houses)—but it has its exceedingly objectionable side.”

“I am so glad to hear you say that, dear uncle,” said Magda fervently.

The old man blinked his eyes. “I am alluding,” he explained hastily, “to the Christmas Peace-making. Viewed with an eye to the Peace-making, it is illogical, absurd. I have often thought that. It is absurd. Now supposing I was present, by accident, at the Peace-making, from a simple consciousness of absurdity, I should have to get up and take Karel’s hand.”

“You would forgive?” she panted.

“My dear, you are not as reasonable as I expected. No. Before my servant my brother called me ‘an idiot.’ To accept that epithet would be to render my position untenable.”

“Paul! He is deaf. I am sure he never heard it. Have you asked him?”

“It is not a subject one discusses with one’s servant,” said Count Robert stiffly.

She came up to him with an arch imperiousness and rang the little hand-bell by his side.

“My dear, you forget yourself!”

“Trust me,” she said pleadingly, “not to do that.”

And when Paul came in—“Paul,” she began, “I think you have omitted——”

“I beg your pardon, Freule,” interposed the old servant promptly. “I can’t hear what you say.”

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"To do something I asked you the other day," shouted the Freule.

"I never heard you. I'm getting deafer. But I was always deaf. What was it, Freule?"

"Paul," interrupted Count Robert suddenly. "The last time I conversed with my brother, did you happen to hear what passed?"

Magda cast the old servant, who adored her, a quick glance of intelligence.

"Not a word, Mynheer the Count," said Paul. "How could I? Why, that's but six years ago. I was quite as deaf then as now."

"You may go," said Count Robert calmly. "My dear, I was under the impression that we shouted. I am glad we spoke like gentlemen. Perhaps it was not as much of a quarrel as we thought. Still, he was very rude to me. I can never forgive him. But I admit that the Christmas Peace-making has become ridiculous. I miss my billiards, Magda; I hope you will develop an aptitude for the game. It is a logical game. I wish July was here; I am looking forward to your coming."

Magda went back to her Uncle Charles. She found him in a state of exultation. He had just secured, by chance, from an itinerant pedlar, a rare piece of genuine old Delft. He lingered in front of his show-cases, and she observed that he especially attracted her attention to the acquisitions of the last half-dozen years. "It is a pity," he said, more to himself. "Robert was a very fair judge of a curio. Now you, Magda, you do your best dear; you do your very best."

"Uncle Karel," said Magda, "in a few weeks I shall be going to Bardwyk for good."

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"Till the 31st of December," corrected the Count, with annoyance. "I cannot help it. I am exceedingly vexed. I shall miss you most dreadfully. Do not agitate me, Magda. I am the elder ; you cannot expect me to take the first step."

"The second ?" begged the girl, with her arm round his neck.

"Nor the second. He called me an idiot before my servant. Me, the head of the family—no man would stand that."

"But, dear, uncle," said Magda, half laughing. "You called him an idiot too !"

"In the *second* place, Magda, I called him an idiot, most certainly. I was right. He was an idiot. As far as that goes, we were both idiots."

"In that case, dear uncle, you, with your natural perspicacity—forgive your little niece ; Uncle Robert is so deliberate, so logical, but he is very much slower in coming to a conclusion than you—you, with your quickness, your keenness of perception, I am sure you would have realized the situation, would have expressed your opinion of it, much sooner than he."

"Dear me, there is something in that !" said Count Charles. "You think I must have been the first to discover he was an idiot ?"

"I am sure of it," replied Magda demurely, and kissed her uncle's hand.

Count Charles took a few steps up the drawing-room and down again. "In any case I refuse to consider the matter before Christmas," he said. "I refuse absolutely ; do you understand ? It would be unfair to your Uncle Robert, who has a right to your six months alone with him. It would be *mean*. I do not think I have

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ever done a mean thing. He would say that was my motive. I refuse absolutely. You will particularly oblige me by not mentioning the subject again."

"You will particularly oblige me," said Uncle Robert, next week, "by not mentioning the subject again. I should have no objection to a satisfactory settlement with Charles *pro forma*, though I cannot forget that he erroneously mistook me for an idiot. But I have always resolved that any such form of reconciliation should take place exclusively at Christmastide, at the Peace-making. That ceremony I consider the only *raison d'être* of a truce. Our example, I understand, has had the most disastrous effects. The whole neighbourhood is in a more lawless and quarrelsome condition than it ever was before. And no wonder. Logic, after all, rules the world, though short-sighted philosophers deny it. The Peace-making has gone to ruin. There are families that have quarrelled for years. But for us to restore it, personally, as we could do, for ever, would be humiliating in the extreme. Of late, my dear, I have thought it all out. We have no further choice; we must either remain absurd or become contemptible. I should not object to the Peace-making; but it is for ever impossible. Take a book."

Magda went and told the priest, and they wept together. "In no case shall I see their reunion!" sighed Father Cordes. "My days on earth are numbered, I cannot live two months."

"I can do no more. I give it up," said Magda, weeping. "Let us speak of other things. There is one thing I have long been wanting to ask you to do for me, father. On the 17th of June is the anniversary of my mother's death. I want you to let us read a Mass for her and to

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hold a short commemoration service in this church of yours she loved so well."

"I will come myself," said the old man, trembling.

It was during the following night, in a dream, that the great thought came to Magda. Eagerly she went across to Bardwyk, and begged of Count Robert to come. "I loved her dearly," said Count Robert; "I cannot reasonably refuse to be present. Magda, you are a good girl, I would not hurt your feelings. However, I shall not sit in our chairs: you must see I have a seat on the opposite side of the chancel."

Magda stopped at the Pastorage, and held a long confabulation with the father. He blessed her at parting, his hand on her sunny young head.

"Your Uncle Robert coming?" said Uncle Charles. "Well, that shall not keep me from being present. We want such a peace-maker here as your mother, my dear. The long feud between two families at Bardwyk ended yesterday, Peter tells me, in a murder."

"God forgive the guilty," said Magda under her breath.

He glanced across her at quickly. "The Father is failing fast," she said.

"He will outlive Robert and me," replied Count Edelstam testily; "but young people always think the old are going to die."

"He will never conduct another Christmas Peace-making," said Magda.

"We shall see when Christmas comes," replied the Count defiantly.

"When Christmas comes," repeated Magda, and she looked away into the pale blue sky. "When Christmas comes."

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"You are pledged to reticence," said the Count meaningly, "till Christmas comes."

"Yes," answered Magda, "Christmas."

"When does Christmas come?" she suddenly exclaimed—"Wherever the Lord Christ, surely, is born into human hearts. Christmas! it is the Lord Christ's coming! It is his message of peace and his birth of goodwill!" She passed out into the summer night.

For the ensuing weeks she was busy in the little village church. She renovated it entirely with deft fingers, preparing its ornamentation as if for a festival. When the day approached, its altars shone bright with fresh gilding, new embroideries, a profusion of flowers. All the last afternoon she worked hard, admitting no one. Only Father Cordes lent her assistance. It had been her especial desire that the service should be held at the same solemn hour as the midnight Mass of Christmas Eve. She had conquered her uncles' opposition. "It was the time of my mother's death," she reminded them.

And thus, when the hour was come, the peasants, for miles around, crept through the balmy stillness of a soft midsummer midnight to the blazing portal of the little church. In his stall by the high altar, robed and shrouded, white with approaching dissolution, sat the hoary parish priest they had all known all their lives. And, opposite each other, on both sides of the chancel, gazing neither right nor left, but at each other, sat the two Lords of the Manor, the old Counts Edelstam. Between them knelt my mother, thinking of *her* mother, praying as the pure and loving pray for the pure and good. The humble little church was a splendour of lights and roses—white roses, the symbol of peace and of

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innocent grief. And lo ! before the altar, in the place where all were accustomed to see it each December, was the presentment of the holy Nativity in the manger, the worship of the shepherds and the princes, the song of the angels, the evangel of Peace.

There was nothing unusual in the service—the Mass for the Dead. It was not until quite towards the conclusion that the unexpected occurred. The old father got up from his seat, and, tottering, came forward. His broken voice rose shrilly gaining in strength.

“Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be known as the children of God.”

It was the little Christmas service of the Peace-making, falling in where it would have fallen, at the end of the Midnight Mass. When the customary brief allocution was reached, the old priest gasped for breath. In a few simple words he told his hearers that he would never keep Christmas with them again ; he had grieved to see how dissensions had increased among them ; the recent murder had filled all Christian souls with horror. Once more before God called him away to his rest, he desired to hold among them the wonted festival. He had chosen this anniversary of the death of her to whom the institution owed its origin, the blessed peace-maker that had long been called away from amongst their midst. “But the eternal Prince of Peace is here,” said the father : in the utter silence his feeble words fell low. “He is here, and He is waiting for His birth in every heart. And His message is the same, my children, yesterday, to-night, and for ever, the message of forgiveness and good-will.”

As he ceased speaking, the simple village choir, but little disconcerted, raised the familiar chant of the Heavenly Host, and the whole congregation took it up.

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As the Christmas Anthem filled the building the two brothers left their places—none has ever distinguished who moved first—and silently crossed the chancel and grasped each other's hands.

The father stood, with arms uplifted, transfigured, upheld.

Out of the congregation, before any other could stir, two old men pushed their way to the front, and, below the chancel-steps, Paul and Peter embraced.



## The Notary's Love Story

**T**HIS is not a love story. Not a story, at least, of the fashionable little love with a big L. The little Love that explodes and fizzles, like a little flaring match.

The Notary has never heard of loving or being in love. Only of love-making, the foolish pastime of red-faced lads and lasses, on summer Sunday evenings, among the darkling woods. He disapproves of it.

The village street of Hardeveld lay winking beneath the glare of the savage August sun. Its white cheeks glowed; its green eyes glistened; at its feet the grass blades shrivelled and curled among the red, red-hot paving-bricks. Across every house-front the shutters closed tight, in alternate bars and slits; there was not a breath of motion, not a flutter of shadow, all down the shiny road. Nothing alive but the Lord of an empty Heaven, spreading, like a truculent Pacha, his ample glory before a veiled and cowering Harim.

The whitest-robed and closest-veiled of the houses was the Notary's. A cat pressed up against the blistering door. The Notary's tortoiseshell cat, Rhubarb.

Inside, the Notary's clerks lay, clammy, across their foolscap. He himself sat silent in his sanctum, the Notary, Anthony Barbas. A quantity of papers were

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spread before him ; he was dozing. He had a right to doze ; it was the hour of his fifteen minutes' nap.

He never, in all his uniform life, did anything he hadn't a right to do. It was his method never to do anything else. "All the rest," he used to say, "is waste of time." I speak of him in the past, yet the good man lives, and, therefore, I know, is doing his duty still. Method with him has become a sort of madness, not an easy thing in a country notary. Many times a week he must drive to all-day auctions in untrodden nooks and by-ways ; at any moment he may be summoned by any scheming mortal anywhere.

His only systematic weakness at the time I knew him was his nightly pint of Burgundy, "St. Georges." As the days of the week are uneven in number and his habits are regular, he finished the bottle on Sunday. The one failing had begotten another, his sole bodily ailment. He called it sciatica. The doctor called it gout.

In the quiet house an unobtrusive housekeeper moved smoothly round her middle-aged master. The cat purred, when cosiness seemed to require it. The big white poodle lived, a daily demonstration that life is an enjoyable thing if taken leisurely. His intelligence had never been wearied by useless performances. "Not even a dumb animal," said the Notary, "should be needlessly taught tricks."

The clock chimed the quarter, and Anthony Barbas opened his spectacled eyes. The eyes were pale, like the face, and the face was somewhat pompous, like the figure. Anthony was a comfortably rounded man, respectably angular in feature, profoundly commonplace. His thoughts had been active while he dozed. All the morning he had been abnormally occupied with

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himself. Thinking of that first white hair he had brushed to the dusty-brown surface in dressing.

He had worn gently, for he was close upon fifty. Of late years he had had his sciatica to remind him how very well he felt. Until to-day he had always understood that man was mortal and life everlasting. To-day he knew that life is exceedingly short. It is an experience common to all thoughtful men with one white hair or more. Life is short. And when first we hear the clock strike we look up : 'tis half past !

Anthony Barbas sighed gently, perusing the close-written deed before him. It was not particularly interesting, not even important. His eyes escaped to the lines of light between the shutter-bars. From all these well-screened houses you can look out as much as you care to. That is the beauty of discretion. It cloaks.

"I shall do it to-day," said Anthony Barbas. "It" was a proposal of marriage to Mejuffrouw Sophy Mulder. Mejuffrouw Sophy Mulder was a pleasant young woman of twenty-eight, the impecunious companion of a well-to-do elderly cousin, Mejuffrouw Martha Mary Quint. For the last three years the Notary had intended to marry Sophy Mulder. Often and often had he made up his mind to do it, and have done. But the modification of his domestic economy appeared too incisive, seen close. There was the dilemma. Was it right ? Was it honourable to take advantage of Miss Mulder's position ? How would faithful Sarah Mopsel stomach the insinuation that she had not tended her master well ? Was it fair to risk tardy disparagement of Rhubarb and Ruff ? "Every benefaction," the Notary was wont to say, "creates an obligation. For the benefactor."

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He would reason lengthily, stringing together alternate pros and cons. That is a sensible attitude towards marriage, before thirty, when men seldom assume it. Not that he doubted his personal predilections. He would greatly have liked to marry pretty, pleasant Sophy Mulder. His evenings were lonely ; his comfort oppressed him ; he wanted something more than comfort. It was not his fault that he had not married in time (as women phrase it). His youth had been poverty-stricken, burdened by the care of a mother and sister, both of whom had died when Anthony, past forty, was able to support them. It had taken him some time to shake himself to rights in the belated loosening of his life. Now, he was old and unaccustomed, full of little twists, uninteresting, yet not selfish enough to make a successful bachelor. He hesitated around Sophy Mulder as a moth near a candle, a bee by a flower.

Yesterday he had heaps of time. To-day his feelings were those of the man who must catch a train.

"I shall do it this evening," he said, "as soon as the sun has sunk low in the heavens." He sighed suddenly, and shivered mentally. There was an ugly echo about the words.

A quick step resounded along the silent, stifled street. He knew it was Sophy's ; every Thursday afternoon, at two precisely, she passed, on her way to the almshouses. Peering cautiously, he saw her go by, fresh and refreshing, like a cloud. The Notary wiped his hot forehead.

And once more he built up his resolution, striving to make assurance doubly sure. All the same, he knew that his courage would fail him five hours hence. How many a man has missed a happy marriage because he has to get his hat and go and see about it !

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Sarah Mopsel broke in mildly on his musings. He had been very gentle to her, apologetic even, that morning, when she smoked his coffee. "No, no, it was good coffee," he protested, and then, still unerringly truthful, good coffee up to a certain point. The point when you put it in the pot, Sarah."

"That young man Olland," said Sarah now, "is asking to see you. John Olland, the 'pothicary' prentice that makes love to the hussy next door."

"Show him in," replied the Notary. "Take a seat, young man. The dog won't hurt you."

"'Tis that grease-spot on your trousers he's smelling at," remarked Sarah in retiring. She abhorred the girl next door.

John Olland reddened. He was a harmless-looking creature, not yet five and twenty, with a wave of yellow hair. He deposited a big case under his chair, like an infant's coffin wrapped in baize. "I am come, Mynheer the Notary," he stammered, "I am come, as you may possibly perceive——" the door flew open. "Notary," cried the intruding Sarah, her melancholy features ablaze, "you know I wouldn't venture to trouble you, but if *you* could give him a bit of *my* mind about Susan——" she was gone.

The Notary cleared his throat. "Her manner is wrong, but her meaning is right," he said gravely. "You live almost opposite Mynheer Olland. You should *not* serenade the servant next door. The habit in itself is objectionable. And, besides, it disturbs your neighbours' sleep."

"But I only do it for practice," feebly protested the unfortunate assistant, "she likes me to do it. I don't mean *her*!"

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"Indeed!" cried the Notary, veering round in a fume.

"She knows I don't. I told her it was practice. She thinks that it's very good fun. And, surely, Mynheer the Notary, it does nobody any harm. The liquid sounds of the violin these beautiful moonlit nights——"

"I prefer sleep," interrupted the Notary, restlessly re-arranging his papers.

"But that's not what I wanted to speak about," the young man hurried on, perceiving the movement; his chest broadened, his eye brightened; he was not half a bad-looking young fellow. "I came to ask you to lend me some money," he said cheerfully.

"Oh, of course," retorted Anthony. "Why?"

"When you want money you always go to notaries, don't you?" said Olland reproachfully.

"I don't. Perhaps you thought that was what notaries were made for?"

"Ye—es. Partly."

"Your information was incorrect."

"Look here, Mynheer Barbas. Let me tell you all about it, just one minute"—he flung himself nervously forward, tugging at the violin case. "You know me as the apothecary's assistant opposite. But I'm not that. I wasn't born to be that. You were speaking of my serenade to Su—— to Susan. That's what I am, Mynheer Barbas, by birth and by right, a musician. I've never been properly taught—worse luck!—all the same I can play—and compose." He drew breath, hotly.

"Pose. You were about to remark?" The lawyer abstractedly studied his finger-tips.

"I don't say I'm an unparalleled genius—like Beethoven. People come with a story like that to practical

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men like yourself and get written down idiots at once. All I say is I've plenty of talent. I want to earn my living as a teacher—meanwhile. And now there's an opportunity, such as'll never re-occur, of buying out an old creature that's anxious to retire. It's in my native town ; he's got a lot of cheap pupils. Some day I shall be a popular composer—and pay you back. Look here, Notary. Six weeks ago I sent two of my ' Capriccios ' to Brahms—he's a composer, too, and a sort of connexion of mine ; at least, his name's also Johannes, and, when you've got nobody, that seems like a kind of link. Yesterday I had his answer—you see, they do answer occasionally."

" And what does he say ? " exclaimed the Notary, bending forward with sudden interest.

" It isn't a very long answer. But I hardly expected it would be. ' Endeavour is always an admirable thing,' he says, ' yet it is better not to try again than never to succeed.' Of course it is. ' Endeavour,' you see, he says, ' is an admirable thing.' Isn't that encouraging ? A great man like Brahms advising *me* to persevere ! "

" My time is much occupied," was the Notary's unexpected reply. He spoke irritably, from sheer disappointment. He looked away from John Olland's ingenuously upturned countenance. " Presently I must—ahem—pay a visit." He glanced nervously at the clock. " I have not, as you appear to imagine, immense cellars full of gold at my disposal ; but, of course, I can sometimes—for my clients—negotiate a loan. On excellent security. Yours would be—— ? "

" My talent," replied Johannes.

" Quite so. Your security would be your assurance. And the sum required ? A couple of hundred florins ? "

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"Fifteen hundred," replied Johannes, a little crest-fallen.

"I fear I can hardly manage it. Good-day, Mynheer Olland. Take a bit of unsought advice. Stick to your pestle and mortar. Few men want music, and all men, sooner or later, want pills."

John Olland's face was purple. He rose to his feet. "I'm not ashamed of the shop," he said. "It's not that. I could have stayed on here quietly enough, and worked at the composing meanwhile. But it's Susan. Hang it, Mynheer Barbas, the real Susan's name is Sophy. I'm awfully sweet on her. I'm longing to marry her. And no one could ask her to take up with a chemist, though perhaps she might stoop—for stooping it *would* be—to a Brahms."

"'Sophy,'" repeated the Notary, rapidly reviewing the few beauties of Hardeveld. An increasing anxiety sharpened his accent and features.

"It's Sophy Mulder. The 'Serenade' is to her; only I never can let her hear it, because of her old cousin and—the watchman. I love her—awfully. My parrot—you know my clever parrot?"—"I do, indeed," inserted the Notary, bitterly—"yells out 'Susan' from morning to night. I had to make it 'Susan' but he means 'Sophy.' Your neighbour's servant knows he don't mean her. You can't think how it cheers me in the shop."

"And Miss Mulder returns your affections?" faintly murmured the Notary.

"She's never heard of them as yet. Had you lent me the money"—wistfully—"I should have gone to Miss Martha Mary to-night. Won't you let me just try that 'Capriccio'? I brought my instrument with me on



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purpose. You will see there is really something in it. Brahms liked it"—the violin was already at his shoulder, a preliminary shriek swept the strings.

"Not here! Not in office hours!" cried the Notary, now also erect, hardly knowing what he said. "Mynheer Olland, I consider you impertinent. The lady in question is five times your age, and is also your social superior!" He threw open the door to the office. There was a sudden scratching of pens. The office seemed almost hotter than the sanctum.

"Five years older, you mean," corrected the apothecary's assistant politely. "It's three. Well, sir, I suppose it can't be helped. No offence was intended. Excuse me. Good day, sir."

As the visitor departed through one door, the Notary opened the other. He just stopped for his tall hat and stick, in the hall, and then, avoiding the business entrance from the garden, burst out into the roadway, upsetting the cat. He tore up the dead street and round a corner. Then he paused for breath, mopping his neck with a red pocket handkerchief, and reflected that after having waited five years, he might now have waited to put on a clean shirt. At least he could have extracted the tell-tale hair. He had left it untouched that morning, in the vain yearning that it might re-brown.

"The insolence! the idiocy!" he muttered, as he swayed across the village square. "But its I that am the idiot with my shilly-shally selfishness! Had she fallen a reluctant victim—poor unbefriended orphan—to that blockhead serenader—I—I—I." He panted along the sunlit parsonage palings. The minister's slow head

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arose above them. "Somebody dying," concluded the minister. "Humph! Sending for him, not for me."

Miss Martha Mary Quint was one of the chief notables in a village destitute of gentry. She enjoyed (outrageously) the reputation of being the richest person in the place. For years she had lived with her now defunct sister, Miss Mary Martha, in the house which their father had built and bequeathed to them. The latter worthy, a shrewd master-builder and prop of the national church, had all his life long kept one eye on the main chance here below, and the other on possible awards up above. He had always proclaimed himself prosperous and pious, and people had taken him at his own valuation. His first daughter he had named after both the sisters of Bethany. "For, with full respect for the powers that be," he said, "seems to me you want the pair of them, to get through all round. Why, without Martha to help her, Mary would never have got to the other side at all! So Martha for this world, Dominé, and Mary for the next." "And you put Martha first?" said the minister. "She was the eldest," retorted the deacon.

The birth of a second child had seriously nonplussed him, till, suddenly, on the second day, his knotted brow relaxed. "She must take her chance of this world," he said. "And we'll call her Mary Martha."

Truly enough, Miss Mary Martha had proved the less ungentle of the sisters. She had granted straw when exacting bricks, and her whips had fallen slack beside Miss Martha Mary's scorpions. She had accentuated her other-worldliness by dying before her elder sister. "And on a Sunday, too," said Miss Martha Mary triumphantly.

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"I am glad it is you, Notary," exclaimed Miss Martha Mary, rising from her straight-backed chair, as the purple gentleman boiled over into her shaded parlour. "I have been wanting to send for you—for days."

"I have not been from home, madam," replied the lawyer, as soon as he could trust himself to speak. "I myself am now venturing to approach you on a matter of considerable importance——"

"My affairs first, if you please," interrupted the lady. Her harsh voice shook. He wondered, could she possibly be "nervous."

"Let me speak at once, or I shan't speak at all," she continued. "I want you to make me a will. There, its out. Now the rest'll be easy enough." She gave a little gasp. "Make *me* a will! It sounds mighty queer. I've always had sufficient will of my own, for this side of the grave, at any rate. Mary Martha died intestate, and very proper, with me behind her; but in my case, that won't do. So, although I never did such a thing in my life before, and detest the disgusting idea, just sit down immediately, Notary, and write off my will."

"My dear lady," expostulated the lawyer, for the fiftieth time in his career, "there is really no cause to feel flurried. The mere consigning to paper of a last will and testament, in itself an exceedingly commendable action——"

"Flurried?" she cried furiously, vexed to read his thoughts by her own, "do you fancy I fear that I'm going to die, as a consequence of making my will? I am making my will, Mr. Notary, because I am going to die!" she snorted at him. "Two months ago," she hurried on, "the doctor told me I had a heart complaint, warranted to kill without warning. I knew it. 'You

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may live to be a hundred,' he said. They always say that. So I may. I'm sixty-seven. Had I been Mary Martha, I should have been underground by now."

This was so manifestly correct that the Notary nodded his head.

"So make me a testament," continued the spinster, "and just put in this: 'I leave all my possessions, whatever they are, to Sophia Alethea Mulder, my cousin once removed.'"

The Notary, worn out with the hurry and worry, felt the straight-lined room curve suddenly all around him. "Am I to understand," he stuttered, "that you appoint Miss Sophy Mulder your unconditional heiress and residuary legatee?"

"Of course, you're to understand what I say, Barbas—if you can! Residential legatee, I suppose, is your lawyer's jargon. So she is. She's lived with me now six years and more, and a very good girl she is on the whole. At least, she is good in intention, which is more than can be said of a servant nowadays."

"But you told me not long ago—I remember it distinctly—that not a penny of yours should ever go to Sophy! I know you did! I know you did!"

"Hoity-toity, do you grudge the girl her better luck? I remember perfectly. It was at the doctor's, Barbas, that evening you trumped my ace. It's three years ago, at the least. And I don't mind telling you now that I thought in those days you were weighing your chances with Sophy. And I wasn't going to have you reckon on any pickings of mine. I stand in my own shoes, Notary. For shame, an old fellow like you! But I know now, of course, I was mistaken. The best girls don't marry, I always say—won't marry, I mean."

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"Miss Sophy Mulder," repeated Anthony dully.

She shot a sharp glance at him. "Barbas," she said, "you are growing old before your time. There's a white hair on the left side over your ear. But there mustn't be any mistake about my will, mind. Perhaps it were better a younger man should make it?"

"As you please," said the Notary stiffly.

"Ta, ta. A young man, and not take a joke from an old woman! For you are a young man still, or very nearly. One white hair doesn't make a winter. Marry, Anthony Barbas, marry while you still can get a woman under forty. Soon that idea will seem absurd. And now, is my will to be made or not?"

"Perhaps you will permit me to suggest," protested the miserable man, "that stamped paper is required for official documents."

"I know that," responded Miss Quint, "there's a sheet in the chiffonnière that the carrier brought me from town. I've had it in the house six weeks."

"I would rather work the clauses out at home," said the Notary; "it is customary——"

"Clauses? There are no clauses. You shall do it here, and at once, or not at all," said Miss Martha Mary Quint.

She marched to the cupboard, and unlocked it, enjoying now, with a certain unction, the long-dreaded ceremonial. The formal arranging of the implements took time.

"And now, it is hopeless and impossible!" reflected Anthony Barbas, his pale eyes staring at the wall. Over and over again he said to himself, "Yesterday I might have done it—any time these last five years I might have done it! I can never do it now."

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"What's worth doing at all is worth doing at once," said Miss Martha Mary. "that's why I waited six weeks." She carefully selected a new pen. "And all things come round to the man who can wait. That's why I'm in such a foolish hurry now. No one would ever have known what fools men are, if it weren't for the proverbs. 'The accumulated wisdom of the centuries,' the paper called them yesterday." "And now, for heaven's sake, Notary, don't be all day about it!" she burst out pettishly, with true human (men call it "feminine") logic, as she laid down the pen before him. "Get it over, and you shall have a glass of my home-made anisette."

The Notary knew the notorious anisette. It had given him the heartburn before.

He settled gloomily down to his work, and laboriously indited the beloved one's name, encurling it in flourishes which made him feel thirty years younger—memories of a caligraphic clerkship, a moth-eaten past. Miss Martha Mary looked over his shoulder. "I suppose I must pay for those whirligigs?" she said.

He looked up in her face. There were tears behind his spectacles; she thought they were rheum.

"Miss Sophia Alethea Mulder, spinster—spinster—spinster. Two witnesses are of course required," he said, "in writing. Have you got them in the chiffonnière too?"

"Dear me, Anthony Barbas, that's the first time in all these twenty years I've heard you say anything sounding sharp. Not that it could be, really, coming from so mild a man. You don't look well this afternoon; I suppose it's the heat upsets you. Though Sophy keeps this room cool enough, I'm sure, since last week's

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scolding. Oh, I can manage Sophy! Call in any two men from the street."

"I prefer my own clerks," suggested the Notary, "they are better at keeping the secret——"

"I daresay. And the fees. Nonsense, Barbas, of course you will read—as always—so that nobody understands a word. And besides, all the village may know—I should like it to know—my intentions regarding Sophy!" She threw back the window-blind: suddenly a torrent of golden heat filled the solemn parlour.

On the further side of the dusty road there stretches a sort of common, broken by beech trees. Under the shade of a prominent giant lounged a solitary individual; his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the house. "There's nobody in sight," cried Miss Quint with annoyance. "The whole world's a furnace; nobody could venture out but the Three Good Young Men and yourself. Sophy doesn't count. She's an angel. Who's that yonder under the beech trees? Come here, you, sir, you 'pothicary's 'prentice! Why aren't you doing your duty, concocting poisons? Come here, and make yourself useful, for once, in connexion with death!" She beckoned vehemently.

Barbas started up. "You don't mean to say," he exclaimed, "that you're going to entrust such a secret to yonder young mountebank! Consider, Miss Quint, I beseech you——"

She faced him. "My secrets are my own to betray," she said viciously, "I'm doing what I can for the girl. And she won't nurse me any the better, or worse. Ring the bell for my gardener, Barbas. Good afternoon, Olland. Take a seat. Psha!"

John Olland sat down, darting terrible menaces at

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Anthony. Deaf Pete was introduced from the pigstye, and the atmosphere grew heavy with the fragrance of the fields. "Phew!" said Miss Martha Mary, clutching her Eau de Cologne bottle. "This is my last will and testament. Read quick, Notary. Please!"

When Barbas' agitated explanation and brief reading of the document were over, John Olland remained staring angrily from face to face. He considered himself insulted and outwitted by this evil couple of capitalists. He clenched his impotent fists. To offend Sophy's tyrant would be madness. All his accumulated wrath glowed red against the Notary. He flung his signature sprawling across the open page, and, with scornful rejection of the timidly proffered fee, he made for the door.

"A word in your ear, young man!" cried Miss Martha Mary. She lifted her yellow face to his red one. "I spoke to the watchman to-day," she said, "of people who prowl round my house at night! But I see they now come at all hours!"

"I was waiting for the Notary!" murmured Olland. He fairly ran away, and Anthony Barbas ran after him.

"Notary! Notary!" screamed the spinster. "It wasn't *my* business brought you here! Remember that, please, when you make up your bill. And now, what might you want of me, pray?"

"Nothing, nothing. I have changed my mind," replied Anthony, in the doorway.

"I suppose it was an offer of a mortgage. Now, Barbas, I have told you before that the only investments I believe in are Government securities. You will never see a penny of mine."



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"So I quite understand," replied the Notary, disappearing.

"Oh, I quite understand," said the Notary, outside.

Miss Martha Mary resumed her knitting. "And a very lucky thing he came," she mused, "for I don't think I should ever have brought myself to summon him. As for that young noodle's appearance on the scene—why, *that* was simply providential." She nodded, wisely, and rang an angry handbell. Sophy came in, looking strong and cool. "Sophy, I'm sure that it's time for my medicine. I've just left you all my money. So no wonder you want me to die."

Sophy stole her pretty arm round the wrinkled neck. "What a wicked creature you would be," she answered, "if you meant one-half you say."

"If I said what I mean, I should be far wickeder," declared the old woman, almost regretfully, and winked.

Anthony Barbas, dully wandering homeward, found the first narrow pathway blocked by the chemist's assistant.

"One moment, please, Notary!" said the young man ceremoniously, "one question, please. When I spoke to you this afternoon about Sophy had you formed any plans of your own?"

The Notary hesitated, wishing for once he had learnt how to lie. With a rush all John Olland's pent-up reproaches rose hissing to the surface.

"I followed you to the house!" he shouted. "What a hurry you were in to betray me! What a joke with the old beldame, while securing the heiress. Ah, you thought I was 'insolent,' did you?—'impertinent' to

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come in your way ! I'm not such a fine gentleman as you ; I haven't got any money or position ! And she's younger than *you*, never fear ! " He fell back half a pace, and the Notary threw up one arm, but the poor fellow's thoughts were not of physical violence. " I wouldn't exchange with you," he said, " not with *you*, Mr. Barabbas."

From the depths of the Notary's own bitter disappointment a smile bubbled up. " Your comparison," he said, " is unfortunate. The notable point about Barabbas was surely that they let him go." The other fell aside with an oath.

The Notary was more to be pitied than John Olland, and he knew it. For his disillusionment, neither so high nor so low, was a dead and definite level. He had nurtured this plan for five years. There would be no more plans.

He was excessively irritable about the soup, which Sarah Mopsel had burnt. " It's too bad that you cannot attend to me better," he grumbled. Incontinently she sniffed. " You can't say I'm exacting," he exclaimed in desperation. " God forbid," replied Sarah. " And what would you do, then, if I sent you away ? " " Go, —and pray God bless you," said Sarah with a gulp. He pushed back his armchair from the table. " Oh, bring me the Burgundy ! " he cried. He thought the room looked squalid. He reached for his tobacco-pouch. At this accustomed signal Rhubarb jumped down on his shoulder, and Ruff placed a soothing pink nose between his knees.

It was some days later that Anthony Barbas, as he passed down the street in the hush of a cloudless evening,

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his sad thoughts bending a back already bowed—stopped suddenly, hearing his own name called. He turned in the middle of the road, his wide hat against the sunset, his arms, and projecting stick, behind his portly frame. A shriek and a whistle greeted him. "Barabbas! Barabbas!" cried the parrot from his perch, "Pretty Susan!" John Olland stood by the window in a Napoleonic attitude, a sneer on his good-natured face.

The Notary shuffled round again. "No, I shall not complain to the chemist," he muttered, "God bless my soul, what does it signify?" But Sarah was not so half-hearted, she said; and, as the nuisance increased and attracted notice, she threw out dark hints of a mission for Rhubarb. "Peace," said the Notary, suddenly, sternly. "Barabbas! Barabbas!" The little street boys called it.

So the melancholy days went slipping by each other, and nobody got married in the village of Hardeveld. But that had always been the rule, the Hardeveld virgins said. Winter came; the whole world grew old. The Notary had a cough.

He was sitting at his breakfast one foggy day, when a brown paper parcel was brought to him. He opened it listlessly, and there lay the parrot, his persistent tormentor, the sharp eyes glazed in death. "Rhubarb!" exclaimed the Notary, to the tortoiseshell cousin on the hearth rug, "*Rhubarb!*" There was no responsive slink. Besides, cats have no consciences. Their morality is a purr and a grin.

Rhubarb lay blandly smiling, with closed eyes and swelling chops. Anthony gingerly turned the stiff bundle. A paper lay under it.

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"SIR,—It's not your cat's doing ; I wrung the bird's neck. Serves me right. I behaved like a cad and am very sorry for it. " JOHN OLLAND.

" P.S.—I couldn't bear to hear him always saying ' Pretty Susan,' anyhow.

" P.P.S.—He was growing very old and mangy."

Anthony dropped the carcass.

There was actually a P.P.P.S. !—" She's a rich woman now, too good for either you or me."

Anthony dropped the paper. He sat looking out of window, wondering what those last words meant. He had heard nothing.

" Here's Mynheer Olland," said Sarah gruffly, at his elbow. " Of course you won't admit him." Her little eyes lengthened at sight of the mess on the floor.

" Yes, he will," said John Olland, in the middle of the room. " Notary, the man's a coward that can only write he was wrong. I've come to say it."

Barbas held out his hand. " What's this," he asked, " about Sophy—Miss Mulder ? "

" Haven't you heard ? Then they're sure to be here in a moment. Miss Martha Mary was found dead in her bed this morning. You and I know what that means for Sophy. She's the richest woman in Hardeveld now."

The Notary nodded. " It doesn't make an atom of difference to you or to me," added Olland, " I've long ago given up thinking of her—given up all thought of her, I mean."

The Notary nodded again, busy with his own reflections.

" I suppose she refused you," continued his visitor,

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"like the plucky creature she is. No offence. I was sorry for you, Mynheer Barbas. After a while."

"There is Miss Martha Mary's gardener," said the lawyer, rousing himself. "I must go to him, Mynheer Olland. Come and talk to me about the music some evening"—he leaped boldly, self-sacrifice begetting its brother—"and play."

John Olland shook his head. "The music's no good for a livelihood," he said, "not for me. I *can* play, and I *can* compose, but what's the use if nobody buys? So I'm going to be a chemist after all." He turned on his heel.

A few minutes later the Notary was closeted with Miss Sophy for the first time in his life. Sophy sat, sweetly sorry and tearful, but the Notary was the paler of the two.

"From which written declaration of the defunct now before you," the Notary was saying, "it appears that, after sustaining considerable losses through speculation, she sank the remainder of her means in an annuity which just enabled her to keep up her position in this place. When everything is paid, dear Miss Mulder, you will be practically penniless. I cannot understand"—his face grew fierce—"the comedy of the will."

"It was all she could do for me," replied Miss Sophy gently, "she meant it as a kindness; she thought it would get known and would help me to secure a husband. It was very unselfish of her, really." Miss Sophy smiled faintly through her tears.

"But what now?" cried the agitated lawyer. "What are you going to do?"

"Surely that is a little premature," replied Miss Sophy; "unlearn being an heiress first."

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"Will you marry me?" cried Anthony Barbas. "Now, don't go and think me indecent, and your cousin not yet cold. It was brutal of her, I tell you, Miss Sophy. Miss Sophy, I'm a middle-aged man with a lot of grey hairs and a competence. I'm not rich. Miss Sophy, will you marry me?"

The girl's eyes dropped; her whole frame trembled. "Hush," she said, "hush. You shouldn't speak of such things now, Mynheer Barbas—and here." She cast a timid glance over her shoulder. "You are very good—very good, and I know it. Very kind."

"Which means no," said Anthony softly. "I am old and a fool. I hope to God you will get a better husband, my dear!"

A long silence ensued. "It doesn't matter," said Sophy at length, "about the will. Nobody knows."

"One man knows," said the Notary.

A blush overspread all her pink and white face. "You mean John Olland," she replied. "Oh, but he has got nothing to do with it. It is nothing to him."

Something—he could not have told you what—brought Anthony a sudden revelation as she spoke. He got up. "I will come again this afternoon," he said, "and help you with everything. Good-bye."

He did not go home immediately, but walked into the chemist's and bought four pennyworth of lozenges for his cough. John Olland was alone in the shop. "Olland," said the Notary carelessly, "you say you were so fond of Miss Mulder once. Have you ever spoken to the lady?"

And John Olland's healthy cheeks grew apple-red at once. "Often," he replied, hard at work on his little parcel. "She was in the choral society, Mynheer

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the Notary. I used to meet her regularly once a week."

"Nothing, I suppose, has ever passed between you?" The Notary drew circles on the floor with his stick—painfully accurate circles.

"I regret you should consider that question necessary," replied John Olland, hurt. "Am I the proper person to make love to the heiress of Hardeveld?"

"She isn't an heiress, John. She is penniless." The Notary shouldered his stick. "Listen, boy; wait a week or two, and then go and ask her to marry you. If she consents——"

"I—I don't understand," said John Olland, crushing down the little parcel on the counter.

"If she consents, come and talk to me about that little loan of yours. One thousand florins ought to get you a small pharmacy of your own. In another village, John. You won't mind that."

"I—I don't understand," said John Olland. "Was I wrong after all, this morning, Notary? Had you never proposed to her?"

"You were wrong," said the Notary. "I had never proposed to her." And he walked out of the shop towards his office door.

## The Banquet

**T**HEY were sitting in the tidy cottage, at the summer Sabbath midday, round the Sabbath midday meal, the four of them—old Lobbers and his wife, and his two half-sisters, Lisbeth and Maria, tottery and decrepit, all four of them, and a little snuffy and bleary-eyed, but neat, like the cottage, with Dutch neatness, of spotless muslins and abundant starch and soap.

Liza, the elder of the step-sisters, a flabby loosely built female, in the careful Poorhouse dress—Liza stretched out a long arm towards the steaming cauldron, but her watchful hostess knocked it aside.

"We ain't all got your teeth!" said Vrouw Lobbers. "Give yer family a chance, if ye can."

"But I ain't had my money's worth yet!" cried Liza, with uplifted fork. "I ain't had my money's worth, Jane!"

"And what d'ye consider y'r money's worth, pray?" retorted Vrouw Lobbers, "with potatoes at four florins the——"

"I don't care what's the price o' potatoes. I pay you a silver twopenny bit every Sunday, to come and have my Sunday dinner here, and if I can't be allowed to have my money's worth, I'll go and give my silver somewhere else."



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"Where?" interposed her step-brother, fiercely chewing.

"Anywhere. They'll take me anywhere for twopence—ay, and give me butcher's meat."

Vrouw Lobbers laughed aloud. She was rather a cheerful-looking woman, with a red face in the snowy frills of her cap. "Butcher's meat!" she repeated, vastly amused.

"Butcher's meat!" echoed pensively the younger step-sister, Maria, who lived with the Lobberses, and her eyes rested long on the contents of the pot.

"She lies," said old Lobbers.

"Of course. She knows that as well as you do," assented his wife, still laughing.

"I wish I was dead," said old Liza, making another dash at the dish.

The Vrouw shook her head. "Don't you go tempting the Powers above," she said solemnly. "They've forgotten you. Let well alone, and eat your dinner," and she thoughtfully drew, with her knife, two fat bits of bacon out of her sister-in-law's reach.

"There's not ten years between the whole lot of us," replied Liza, curiously watching the bacon.

"No. I'm sixty-seven, and you're seventy-five—that's the difference. All the same, your one single back-tooth—for feeding—is worth half a dozen o' mine."

"I haven't no back-tooth, and you know it," replied the spinster, peevishly grinning. "Nor I don't believe you've got half a dozen. I don't need to chew my food. I just bolt it. That does well enough."

"You've nigh killed yourself over-eating several times, all the same," objected her step-brother.

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"Nigh killed ain't near buried," grunted Liza. "And I had a good time while it lasted. Doctor says, down at the house: 'You're a glutton. You'll die of an indigestion,' he says; and a fine thing, I tell him, for a pauper to die of; but I shan't have got it in the Poorhouse—no!" She chuckled. "All the pork's eaten," she said, bending for a closer inspection. "You might as well let me finish the carrots before they get cold."

"There's almost enough left to do for to-morrow," began Vrouw Lobbers doubtfully.

"If you was to die, there'd be a vacancy," said Lobbers, pushing back his chair; "and who knows but we might get in Maria?"

"I won't take the bath," interrupted Maria.

Vrouw Lobbers pushed the pot across with sudden resolution. "Help yourself, Elizabeth, and welcome," she said. "You'd take the bath quick enough, Maria, if they put you into it."

"I wouldn't! I wouldn't!" reiterated the old creature with tremulous eagerness. "You wouldn't let 'em; would you, Dirk?"

"What a fuss!" said the grumpy brother. "Don't ye wash yer face and hands every morning? It's only like washing them a little lower down."

"It'd kill me!" cried Maria hysterically. "I never took a bath in my life. Dirk, you wouldn't let em bathe me as if I was a woman from the streets!"

"Oh, hold yer tongue about yer killings!" interposed Vrouw Lobbers unamiably. "Liza isn't dead yet."—"No," said Liza.—"And she's two years older'n you." After that nothing was heard for some time but the noise of Liza's greedy eating: then the

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mistress of the cottage crossed to a perfectly ordered cupboard and produced a bottle of gin and a bag of tobacco. She filled two bright little glasses for her husband and Liza. The gin was an extra: during its consumption both purveyor and purchaser watched anxiously for some cause of recrimination or complaint.

When the last drop had been licked from her glass, Liza struggled to her feet. "I shall go and visit Greta, our cousin," she said, and then added, in a sudden impulse of malice—"As you wish it, I'll speak to her about dining there o' Sundays. She could easily give me a better dinner than yours for the money, and she wouldn't talk about wanting me dead!"

"*We* wish it!" exclaimed Vrouw Lobbers aghast. "Oh, the wickedness! And I that allowed you to clean out the dish!"

"I didn't say I'd decide nothing—not definite," replied the old pauper, pinning on her workhouse shawl. "But I'm sick o' being told every week that I eat too much. You want to make too big a profit out o' me, Jane. That's the truth. I don't mind you having the money as well as another—blood's blood—but twopence is twopence. And I've a right, as I may say, to my——"

"Don't yer say 'money's worth'!" cried Lobbers, with a bang of his fist on the table.

"La! at Cousin Greta's I could say what I choose! I'll just go across to her and see what she thinks."

"I'll take yer across," said Maria. "Maybe, as it's Sunday, she'll give us some coffee." And the two old women wandered away down the populous village street.

Their sister-in-law remained watching them from

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her freshly whitewashed little house with the broad geraniums in the window—the cottage stands back by itself, beyond a sort of common: from it you could see the usual Sunday picture of animated repose—children in brilliant colours scrambling across the roadway, men with shiny shirt-sleeves loitering against green shutters, a medley group, beneath the lengthening shadows, playing at pitch-and-toss.

Vrouw Lobbers turned back into the dusky house. "Any man but you," she said, "'d be ashamed to have such sisters."

"Step-sisters," corrected Lobbers, smoking viciously.

"'Tis all the same. I'm dead-sick o' feeding 'em!"

"Liza pays her tuppence," said the man, "when she comes. O' Sundays."

"And what does Maria pay—Sundays or weekdays—whom we've had on our hands these fifteen years?"

"If Liza was to die," said the man, "we could get Maria into the Poorhouse. She wouldn't cost us anything. She'd pay her tuppence o' Sundays."

"Liza ain't a-thinking o' dying," said the woman, tidying up the things.

"You can die without thinking," replied Lobbers sententiously. "Some day some big morsel'll stick in her throat."

"I wonder"—remarked the woman, pausing reflectively. Then she drew the gin bottle out of her husband's reach. The old man did not ask what she wondered.

"Such things do happen," continued Vrouw Lobbers, carefully considering. "When I was a girl, and in service, there was the cook's son, a charity boy, used to come o' Sunday evenings, and his mother'd give

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'im a dinner. And one Sunday, after he'd eaten it—veal pudding it was and cold pastry—'Mother,' he says, 'what d'ye think I done afore I come away? Eaten all the other boys' porridge,' he says, 'twelve plates—as none o' the others'd touch.' ”

“There was fourteen plates,” interrupted Lobbers, pulling at his pipe, “and he went home that night and his stomach burst. You’ve told me that story before, Jane. La!—not two Sundays goes by that you don’t tell the tale to Liza, not ten meals that you don’t tell it to Maria.”

“You’re mighty quick in your ‘rithmetic,” spitefully retorted the woman. “Their appetites wouldn’t so madden me as they do, could I fancy a morsel myself.”

“There you’re right,” said the man with conviction. “I and you, we was always poor eaters. Cheap eaters we was. I often think what a lot we could save if it wasn’t for Maria! She’s wonderful hungry for one as does no work.”

The woman came and sat down over against him: the smart little pink and white tablecloth spread between them, a blue vase stood upon it, with pretty blue flowers.

“You talk, but I reckon,” she said.

“I know, Jane, you was always an excellent reckoner.”

“I reckon, I tell ye. Down to a cent, and the half of a cent. I’ve got it all down on paper, every penny she cost us. Not that it’s any use, for we shan’t ever get back a brass farthing, but I can’t help it: I was born that way; I must cipher and count. She costs us a florin a week, speaking roughly, more than we should need to spend if she wasn’t there.” Vrouw

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Lobbers got up again. "I'll give ye the exact figures, she said, "I've got 'em in my copy-book."

"No," said the man, with an oath, "I don't want no figures. It's bad enough as it is, but it can't be helped."

"No, it can't be helped," she repeated, and picked a loose thread from the tablecloth. "At least," she added presently, "I suppose not."

He stared, with extended pipe. "What d'ye mean?" he said roughly.

"I wish it could be helped; that's all I mean. We should be very comfortable if it weren't for Maria."

"We can manage," he said, a little anxiously. "At any rate, at present."

"What do *you* mean?" she exclaimed, advancing her face across the table.

"I've always had my wages regular: that's all I mean. Six florins a week; 'tisn't much, but it's more than they always gives to a labourer. I shouldn't like if they was to give us less."

"Like?—it'd ruin us, I tell ye. You're no reckoner like me. I save and I slave all day long to keep things going. I can just do it with the money. Don't you bring home a penny less."

"I never did, Jane. I never was one o' that sort—no, not as a young man."

"Then don't you go talking nonsense about beginning now. I want every penny I can get to keep things going. D'ye hear?" She cast a proud look round her spotless cottage. "Only yesterday the minister's wife was in, and 'Vrouw Lobbers, there's not a neater dwelling than yours,' she says."

"I know, I know. You told us at dinner. And she's said it before."

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"Said it before? I should think she had. She says it every time she comes."

At this stage, Maria crept meekly in.

"Well?" cried husband and wife together.

"Liza was taken bad," said Maria. "We *had* coffee at Cousin Greta's, and currant buns—Liza had two, and a cucumber. She was taken bad with a choke on her chest—so bad that they sent for the doctor." Maria sniffed.

"Well?" repeated husband and wife together, craning forward, the pair of them.

"She'll kill herself some day with her greediness," the doctor says."

"Bah!" exclaimed the husband, sinking back.

"He's said that before."

"She's got something wrong with her heart," said the doctor: he was a long time bringing her round. 'One such another attack, at her age, might kill her,' said the doctor."

"Ah!" said the wife.

\* \* \* \* \*

And the week slipped quietly by. Nothing happened—as usual: the days were, as usual, monotonously full. Lobbers went to his regular work as a labourer in the Baron's woods; Vrouw Lobbers scrubbed and polished late and early; at night she sat down, spotless, and looked around her spotless home. Maria tried to help—to do as much work as was desired of her, continuously scolded, and mercifully resigned. Of evenings, when the man came home, things would grow cheerful: he would read aloud odds and ends from the newspaper, smoking, while the women sewed.

The Saturday came round, on which he was always

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twenty minutes later—pay-time delaying him. Vrouw Lobbers watched at the door, till the minutes had lengthened beyond the half-hour; then she frowned and smoothed down her ample bosom, and sent off Maria to the Poorhouse to find out if Liza were better and could be expected to the Sunday dinner. For Liza had remained ailing all the week with what Maria called "chronicles in her inside." "It's a fit of indigestion," the doctor had answered, when Vrouw Lobbers stopped him in the road; "she'll get over it and live for a year or two yet. But she mustn't have any more."

"Drat the man!" now said Vrouw Lobbers in equivalent Dutch. "If he's gone to the public-house—a thing he never did before—I shall give him more of my mind than he'll care for." But, even as she spoke, her husband turned the corner and came across the common with slow and uncertain step.

Uncertain also, Vrouw Lobbers waited till he lurched over a molehill: then she said decidedly—"He's drunk. Oh, the scandal in a respectable family! Five and forty years long have we never had a thing to be ashamed of. Alas! the day." She stood waiting, her arms akimbo: her husband passed her, as if unconscious of her presence: he went in and sat down.

"And this is the condition you come home in," began the housewife, "on a Saturday night! I don't know what's befallen you, Lobbers, that you should bring down disgrace on two people as never did anything as any one ever could find fault with before!"

He looked up at her, not having heard, with dazed eyes.

"Well, get them copy-books," he said.



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"What, in the name of mischief, do you mean?"

"Them copy-books, you know."

"*What* copy-books?"

"Them as you always write down all the house-keeping in. You ain't got no others. Let me see if I can't understand that two and two don't make five!"

"Why, you never wanted to see 'em before in your life. You're——"

"Never mind; I want to see 'em now. And look here, Jane, give me my pipe."

She went to the cupboard, wondering, not sure of his condition. But she brought the copy-books in silence and spread them out before him. There were two of them, fat and strongly stitched in so-called moleskin: during all her long married life she had neatly written down her accounts first in one, then in the other, carefully re-backing them when they fell to pieces from age.

He turned over a few pages, backwards and forwards, listlessly gazing at the close-written columns of figures: then his eyes grew dim. "I've never been able to make anything of sums," he said. "*You* tell me. But nobody could fell a tree quicker'n I. And now they say I can't!"

"Who says?" she exclaimed, erect and fierce.

"The Baron's agent. Jane, it's come at last. I've been expecting it ever since the winter. I'm put on the 'old ones' list, as they call it. I'm to have a florin less than till now."

"A florin less! I can't manage, I tell you! I can't manage!" She snatched at the copy-books and drew them towards her.

"Don't," he said. "'Tisn't my fault."

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A sudden compunction seized her. "And I thought you was drunk!" she said.

He looked up reproachfully.

"For shame!" he answered. "You know I was never drunk in my life."

She turned over the pages hurriedly, confusing him with their glitter. "Look here," she said; "let me show you. I can't manage on less. Work it out with me. You must tell the agent. I *can't* keep things decent: the others don't want to. You and I, we're simple folk: we don't eat not more than a morsel, we don't drink not more than a sip of gin on Sundays, for you—but we *must* live clean and decent. We should die if we was turned out of this little cottage. La—a whole florin less! What we had was hardly enough to keep soul and body together!"

"I can't tell him. He won't care," said the man.

They sank into silence, their eyes on the books.

"I've never wasted a farthing on nothing," said the woman at length, in the dusk; "not since we was married, five and forty years ago. The last money I ever wasted went in buying you a fairing, Dirk, when we was courting. I bought you a little red purse—d'ye remember?—to put y'r money in. It cost eighty cents—it had a very good clasp."

"I've got it still," said the man.

"In course you have. But I've always regretted it. People like us don't want no purse." She waited a long time. "All the same," she said reflectively, "I got it cheap."

"Where's Maria?" said the man, anxious to communicate the tidings of his trouble. The woman made answer—

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"Maria, she costs us a florin a week."

"What's that to do with my question?"

"Maria? I tell you she costs us just a florin a week."

"Well, where is she?"

"Gone to ask about Liza's coming to-morrow. Liza's still poorly. Dirk, don't you hear me? Maria, she costs us exactly a florin a week."

"Hear? I should think so! I've heard it a dozen times. Go to h—— with your florin! She'll have to cost us less."

"Do you think she costs us more than she must? Not a cent!"

"Well, what then?"

"We shall have to get rid of Maria."

"We can't. They won't take her in the Poorhouse, Jane—not while Liza's there."

"Don't I know that? Else she'd have been in ten years ago, I promise you."

"What then? We can't kill her."

The woman rose, indignant. "How dare you say such wickedness, Dirk? If any one was to hear us you'd be shamed afore the village."

"I was only joking," he expostulated, with an awkward laugh.

"Joking! 'Tain't no subject for joking. Sakes alive, here's Maria!"

"Are you there, Maria?" began Lobbers immediately. "Something terrible has happened, you must be prepared for it. The agent——" Maria began to cry. "The agent has put me among the 'old ones.' I'm to have a florin less."

Maria laughed, a feeble, old woman's quaver. "I

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thought you was going to say 'turned off,'” she cried.

Her sister-in-law burst out at her in a fury. “Turned off!” she exclaimed; “you grinning fool! And why should they turn him off, pray? D’ye think he’s been accused of stealing, as you was in y’r last place but one?”

“It was a lie,” protested the old spinster, with fresh tears. “It was proved to be a lie. They caught the thief.”

“Lie or no lie, it might have been the truth,” retorted Vrouw Lobbers, who had flung this libel in Maria’s face a thousand times.

“She don’t understand,” interposed the old man. “Not earning her own bread, she don’t mind how it’s paid for. Look ye here, Maria, make sense of this: There’s a florin less to spend every week in this family where there never was florins to spare. Jane and I can’t eat less than we do, Maria.”

“Nor I can’t,” said Maria, with a gulp.

“Well, you’ll have to go and get fed somewhere else, then.”

“You wouldn’t send me away, Dirk. I ain’t got no tuppences to go buying a dinner with.”

“How is Liza?” queried Jane, looking up.

“Very poorly, the doctor says. She’s had some bad suffocations. But she’s coming to-morrow—she told me to make sure and tell you. She’s coming to-morrow, so you shouldn’t think she was ill.”

“Trust her to grudge us the tuppence,” said Lobbers. “She wouldn’t pay for her dinner and not eat it—not she.”

“Well, she’s a right to it,” said Vrouw Lobbers

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briskly. Her voice had resumed its cheery tone. She went and got a shawl and a basket. "I'm just stepping across to the High Street," she said. "As she's coming to-morrow, we must give her the dinner she pays us for. She shall have it, Dirk; she shall have it, Maria, and, as she's poorly, of the best. Saveloys is Liza's favourites: she shall have a saveloy. And cabbages and cucumbers was always her particular vegetables. She shall have a cabbage and a cucumber, Maria; she shall have a cucumber and she shall have a cabbage, Dirk."

It was late when she returned and triumphantly displayed her purchases. The frugal supper did not take long to get ready: they partook of it, and a chapter in *Chronicles* closed the day. After Jane had kissed and comforted her husband, she lay awake for a long time, doing interminable, unreasonable sums. When, at last, she fell asleep, she dreamed she had the nightmare from over-eating. She woke, tired and flurried. She felt glad the morning was Sunday. Maria cooked the coffee; there was nothing to be done but to sally forth leisurely to church. Jane tied her husband's broad black bow for him, as she had always done these five and forty years. In church she looked so neat and "bonnie," with her big black bonnet and big white curls, the minister's wife could not keep back an approving nod. She listened intently all through the sermon: perhaps the minister's wife would not have smiled so kindly had she known that *Vrouw Lobbers* did not think much of the minister's easy theology. "He's always talking of love," said *Vrouw Lobbers*, with unconcealed scorn.

After church the old couple waited for Liza, and

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took her along with them. They listened almost in silence to the poor creature's querulous complaints.

"Yes, I'm coming," said Liza eagerly. "'If I'm well enough to go to church,' I says to the matron (which I'm not), 'I'm well enough to go and get a better dinner than the Poorhouse'll supply.' Not that *you* dinners are anything to boast of at the price, Jane, but the doctor, he's been giving me chicken-broth without any chicken for a week."

At this stage they came across the doctor. "Now, mind you," he said, stopping, "don't you go and eat anything indigestible, Eliza. I won't answer for the consequences if you do. Vrouw Lobbers, see that she's careful."

"Yes, sir, certainly, all I can," replied Vrouw Lobbers, with a curtsy. And as the doctor passed on his way, "You heard him," she said to her sister-in-law.

"I shall eat what I choose," snapped Liza.

Vrouw Lobbers called after the doctor—

"She won't listen to you, sir: how'll she listen to me?" cried Vrouw Lobbers. "It ain't my fault, sir, whatever she does. Mark my words; it ain't no fault o' mine."

"Let her kill herself, if she chooses," the doctor cried back in a rage.

Vrouw Lobbers repeated these words to herself, half aloud. She repeated them twice over. Liza grinned.

"Better go home and have your broth," said Dirk suddenly.

"So that *you* should eat the dinner I paid for!" burst out his step-sister. "Give me back my tuppence, then."

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"I will," said Dirk.

Both women stared.

"You'd better be saving of your tuppences," sneered Liza. "You'll have fewer of them than ever, I'm told."

"Who told you?"

"Never you mind. It's all over the place. You're shelved among the old ones."

"We should be able to get along all the same if it wasn't for Maria and you."

"Me?—me?—"

"Hold your tongue, Dirk, and don't say such wicked things," interposed his wife. "And come in to your dinner, Liza, and thank your stars we can give it you as good."

So they sat down to the midday meal, the four of them, tottery, clean-clothed, blear-eyed, to the Sunday midday meal. They again grew very silent. Maria put down the food.

"A saveloy!" exclaimed old Liza. "Now I take that kindly of you, Jane! My favourite dish, of all things! That's better than Poorhouse broth!"

"Don't you eat of it," said the man, suddenly laying down his knife and fork. "Remember what the doctor told you."

"No, don't you eat of it!" eagerly echoed the wife. Her fingers twitched: there were two white spots on the hard red of her fresh-coloured old face.

"No, don't," repeated Maria.

"So there should be more for you—eh?" answered Liza, looking from one to the other. "I to pay—and you to eat?"

"D'ye think tuppence pays for saveloys, you old

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pauper?" screamed the sister-in-law; but immediately her voice dropped: "I bought it a-purpose for you," she said. "I don't fancy such things. Eat the whole of it if you like: that'll please us."

"I don't believe you, but I will," replied Liza, her mouth full. And so they ate in silence: certainly Vrouw Lobbers had but little appetite: she sat staring at her woe-begone husband: the two sisters consumed as much as they could get.

"Don't you touch the cucumber, Maria," interposed Vrouw Lobbers. "I got it on purpose for Liza."

"Wait till you can pay, Maria," said Liza; but she helped her sister to a few slices as she spoke.

"I shall never be able to pay," said Maria.

"Yes, you will when I'm dead, and they get you into the Poorhouse." Vrouw Lobbers started, despite her self-control. "But I don't intend to give them a chance yet awhile."

"Have some cabbage, Liza?" said Vrouw Lobbers.

"So I shall; but I'll take my own time about it, as I shall about dying. One'd think you *want* me to over-eat myself."

Vrouw Lobbers pushed forward what was left of the saveloy.

"They couldn't get me in. I wouldn't take the bath," said Maria.

Vrouw Lobbers smiled.

"Hold your tongue, Maria, do!" cried her brother—almost kindly.

Liza threw down her fork and knife with a clatter. "Well, it's been a banquet!" she said. "A banquet! Jane, if you get the gin, I shall drink your health."



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Here, get an extra glass for yourself. I'll stand you a sup to drink my health in return with."

"You know I never drink gin," said Jane.

"No; you're a fine lady, you are. But you'll not refuse to drink my health?"

"Yes, I will," said Jane, with downcast eyes.

"It's an ungracious action. Never mind. Here goes yours! You always was an ungracious creature, but I dare say you means well."

Vrouw Lobbers did not answer.

"She means well, I suppose, Dirk, doesn't she?" continued Liza, with a laugh.

"In course she means well," said Dirk suddenly.

The old woman rose to her feet with a gasp. "I'm going back to the house," she said; "I certainly don't feel comfortable. There's this suffocation coming on again. But I've had a good time, and I thank you kindly, Jane."

She tottered out. Maria would have followed, but Jane imperiously motioned her back. The three in the cottage settled down to their several thoughts. The man smoked; Maria dozed; Jane sat with an open Bible on her lap, or occasionally got up and paced the floor.

It was dusk before the doctor burst into the room, his face inflamed.

"What have you been giving that woman to eat?" he exclaimed. "It's killed her."

"Doctor, it's no fault of ours," replied Vrouw Lobbers, in great agitation. "She *would* share our dinner; we hadn't thought she was a-coming. You heard her; you heard her yourself, doctor; it's no fault of ours!"

## THE BANQUET

"I didn't say it was," retorted the doctor testily. "Well, she's done it, as I always said she would."

Maria burst out into noisy crying. "I won't go to the Poorhouse," she sobbed. "I won't, I won't! I won't take the bath!"

The doctor gazed at her open-eyed.

"Hold your tongue, Maria, will you? And before the doctor, too!" cried Vrouw Lobbers. Then she turned to that gentleman. "Don't mind her, please, sir; she's a little—you understand. But that doesn't matter for the Poorhouse, does it, sir? So many of them are. She's down next in the list, sir, and we recommend her for the vacancy. Dirk—~~hold~~ your tongue, Maria!—say we recommend her for the vacancy!"

"We recommend her for the vacancy," said Dirk.

## “ Silly ”

**S**ILLY sat gazing away into the sea. That was his usual manner of spending the empty mornings the empty afternoons. Unless his mother called him back to do some work for her, which was unusual, for Silly did things wrong.

The fifteen years of his lonely life were like a placid, shallow, stagnant water, over which, at constant intervals, swept, from daybreak until evening, the storms of his mother's rages, his brothers' and sisters' teasings and taunts. His father was good to him : sometimes, when his mother beat him, his father would bid her leave off.

He would creep out of the cottage, as often as he could, away among the sand-dunes. He would linger there for hours, and, if unmolested, he would drift away still farther, to the shore.

“ Silly, what are you doing ? ”

“ Nothing, mother.”

“ Then leave off at once, and come here.”

Sometimes he would obey, sometimes not. If not, he would run away farther, into the sand-dunes, and she would beat him, late at night, when he came back. If he went to her at once, she had forgotten, as often as not, for what reason she had called him : if she

## “SILLY”

remembered, and set him a task, he would make a mess of it, and then, probably, she would beat him for that. She was hard-working herself, a poor fisherman's wife with many children and many trials: for ten long years she had been angry with God and with Silly, that her eldest child should have proved an impracticable fool.

And when she saw her sister's boy of twelve go out with his father to the fishing, she hated Silly. On the day when that first took place, and they had extra coffee and buns, with gin for the men, at the sister's house, she broke out angrily, and would not allow Silly to take his bun like the rest.

“Put it down,” she said.

He looked at her, hesitating, disinclined to obey.

“Put it down,” she said again, with a stamp of her foot.

Then he did as he was told, and went and sat among the other children, bunless.

In the evening, when the shadows were falling and the noise of life was stilled, perhaps she somewhat repented—perhaps she thought of her nephew away among the dangers of the deep: she looked kindly at her eldest born, and made as if she would have kissed him, but amongst her sort there was little kissing of big children, and so she refrained, ashamed. But she gave him a penny to buy sweets with. Next morning, however, Silly had dropped the penny, and she boxed his ears.

There was considerable excuse for Silly's mother if she failed in tenderness to her eldest son. Had she kissed him, he would probably not have understood—perhaps, if he had understood, he would hardly have

## “SILLY”

cared. The most manifest fact about this clouded nature was that he “didn’t notice things,” as averse to being petted as he was to being whipped. In truth, he had not sufficient experience of kindly treatment : slow intellects like his require more than a passing impression, and in the haphazard education of the poor a certain quickness is needed for a child to discover that his parents are fond of him. Silly never discovered or thought out anything beyond the immediate gratifications of the simplest animal tastes. He cared about getting sufficient food, if possible, and basking in the sunlight or near the winter fire.

And thus he would lie for hours and hours, beyond farthest reach of his mother’s calling, on the sands, in the golden sunlight, gazing out towards the sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the Château, a mile inward, among the spreading beeches, sat the young Countess through the morning, with her hands upon her lap.

“I am good for nothing,” said the Countess.

Her courtly adviser looked half-reproachful sympathy from the depths of his kindly grey eyes. He was an English gentleman of high position, a well-known and righteously honoured philanthropist : he had been staying for a few days with the young Countess’s parents : the forlornness of her lot had struck him. She was nearly thirty : she was not yet married, nor likely to find a husband ; she sat in the weary pomp of her upbringing, and the gilded days—of which she never perceived the gilding—passed motionless, if such a thing can be.

“Nobody,” said the philanthropist, bending forward, “ever was good for nothing yet. I don’t say there have

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never been people who never found out what especial thing they were good for—though such cases, I should hope, are rare; but there certainly never has been a creature of God's creation that was good for nothing at all."

"Not even snakes?" inquired the young Countess.

"Not even snakes," replied the philanthropist, who trusted his theory to pull him through, though he inwardly despaired of his zoology.

"What use are snakes?" said the Countess.

"Snakes are—are—my dear young lady, they eat a lot of other harmful animals——"

"What use are *they*?" interrupted the Countess; but he pretended not to hear her, hurrying on:

"And very many—er—charming objects are manufactured out of their beautiful skins—such as—er—purses, and—pocket-books——"

"Ah, yes," said the young Countess, with sudden feeling, "some creatures have, indeed, only one use: to die!"

Her pale blue eyes, that wandered across the park, filled with silent tears. He fancied her maudlin; he was far from guessing the hidden sadness of her words. A large sum of money had been left her, under trusteeship, some years ago by an aunt: her father wanted the money; she knew it.

"Our duty is to live," he said, with slight impatience, "and to glorify God."

"But what can I do? I can do nothing," said the Countess.

The distinguished philanthropist had never heard of Lady Clara Vere de Vere, but he asked the annoying

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young person beside him whether there were no poor about her gates.

“ Poor ? Oh, yes, but the minister’s wife looks after them, and tells mamma of any case that’s especially bad. I should be afraid to speak to poor people.”

“ Then you have thought over the matter ? You feel it would be your duty ? ”

“ Everybody does nowadays, don’t they ? It is in the air.”

“ I wish it were ! ”

“ Oh, not the doing good ! The feeling that we ought to.”

“ But if we discern our duty——”

“ Although we perfectly well know we can’t.”

“ Scratch my head,” said the parrot. For there was a parrot in the room, and the philanthropist wished there wasn’t. Last night, in the middle of the drawing-room meeting, having been reinstated by some mischievous nephew, he had spoilt an eloquent bit of special pleading by ejaculating “ Humbug ! ” in that tone of deep conviction which parrots assume.

The young Countess laughed, and, rising, obeyed her favourite’s behest. “ When I die,” she said, “ that is to be my epitaph—my Cousin Frank has promised me—‘ Here lies one who never refused to scratch her parrot’s head ! ’ ”

The philanthropist smiled, and shook his finger at her.

“ Admit at least that it shows a kindly disposition. Peter is the single creature I am not afraid to speak to, the single creature I know who is not cleverer than I.”

“ And you have repeatedly told me that you thought him *very* clever.”

## “ SILLY ”

“ He is clever with my cleverness : so I can compare. He has no initiative, but he can do as he is told.”

“ Well, we came across a boy on the sands yesterday when I was out walking with your mother—a rather nice-looking boy of about fifteen, with a gentle, foolish face. Your mother said he was silly.”

“ Yes, that is his name.”

“ His name ! Poor chap ! Well, now, my dear young lady, do as you are told. Your mother informed me that nobody had ever tried to make anything of ‘ Silly.’ His own parents ignore or ill treat him ; the schoolmaster says, ‘ I have no time for imbeciles ’ ; the minister says, ‘ I have no time for irresponsibles. Is my information correct ? ”

“ Undoubtedly ; you have it from my mother.”

“ Then here is an opportunity. You have time.”

“ For imbeciles ? One has to.”

He looked at her anxiously, for he was as humble as he was kind-hearted and shrewd. “ Surely you could go and talk to this boy,” he said, “ and make him ever so little happier and wiser and better than he is.”

“ I ? Do you take me for a magician ? ”

“ How so ? ”

“ I could make him—momentarily—happier by giving him a penny ; all the unhappier, afterwards, were his mother to take it away. But ‘ better,’ ‘ wiser ’ ! Shall the blind lead the blind ? ”

He waited a moment, looking away. Then he said slowly—“ Yes, the one who can open her eyes shall lead the one who cannot. My dear young lady, I have no intention of preaching to you, but at least, if you can do nothing else, you can teach him the one thing you declare yourself to be clever in. Teach him to do as



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he is told : a most useful thing for one of his mental capacity. His mother, whom we visited, deplored that he was often exceedingly refractory. Here is a mission for you."

"But——"

"I do not think you are as clever in the one thing you are clever in as you imagine yourself to be."

She laughed. "You have me there. I must either prove myself mistaken or obey. I obey, but the consequences be upon your head."

"I accept them. Would that I could always accept consequences as gladly!"

She went out, still laughing; and he, watching from the window, saw her cross the court.

"Humbug! Scratch my head," said the parrot.

He turned abruptly, walked across to the beast, and scratched.

"I think you are wrong," he said to the bowing parrot. "I don't think it's *all* humbug. You see, I've devoted my whole life to it; but, of course, one can never be quite sure."

At that moment the old Countess came in. She was not really old, but middle-aged and comfortable-looking. "What! Have you forgiven Polly?" she said, laughing, for her tact was of the kind peculiar to countesses.

He answered gravely—"I am earning an epitaph."

"I see. You have been enjoying Hilda. She is really a good girl, much cleverer and kinder than you might think——"

"You give me credit for little discernment," he interrupted.

"But she has been brought up among views widely

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different from yours. Her father always tells her that the only use of the peasants is for shooting.”

“For shooting?”

“Not for being shot, of course. You understand as well as I do.”

“Meanwhile, Miss Hilda has gone out to make friends with Silly.”

The Countess sat down. “The great difficulty,” she said, sighing heavily, “with a creature like that is to find him a fixed occupation. Were he to earn something, however little, I believe his mother might be made to grow fond of him. Do you like shrimps?”

“Very much. I like all good things. What connexion have they to your idiot?”

“None at all. I came in to ask; there is a man with them in the kitchen—a rare opportunity; it is so seldom we can get fish near the sea! You shall have an *omelette aux crevettes* for lunch.”

“But I thought the people were fishermen?”

“So they are, but they have contracts with big firms, and everything is sent off to the city.”

“Well, then, here is a small beginning for your *protégé*. Surely he might learn a little shrimp-catching; it is work for old men and children.”

“An excellent idea. I must speak to his mother about it.”

“I am going for a stroll by the sea before lunch. If I meet Mademoiselle Hilda, I will tell her.”

“Oh, blessed omelet!” laughed the Countess.

Meanwhile, Hilda walked with lagging steps along the wide sea-shore. She enjoyed the sunlit day, the far expanse of sand and ocean; she did not enjoy the prospect of Silly somewhere at the end. She had

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always felt an instinctive dread of mental derangement ; had avoided the harmless simpleton, who avoided every one else.

“ I have brought it on myself,” she thought. “ I must keep up my reputation for the only virtue I pretend to possess.” She was very fond of the English guest, an old friend of her mother’s. “ I do not think he does any positive harm,” said the Count.

Silly sat on a sand-dune at no great distance from the village, for his mother had told him to “ clear out ” that morning ; so he felt comparatively safe. He saw the young Countess coming, but did not run away from her, as the last thing he would have considered likely was that she should address him. His world did not include her—it included barely half a dozen human beings—but he touched his cap, as did every one, as she passed.

“ Good morning,” said the Countess, and, to their common perturbation, she sat down.

Silly did not answer, being too shy.

“ What a fine morning it is ! ” presently continued the Countess ; this remark Silly considered exceedingly foolish.

The Countess dug deep down into her intelligence. “ What is your favourite amusement ? ” she began, following the rules she had learnt for conversation.

“ No,” replied Silly, meaning he had none, or couldn’t understand, or think it out. “ Have you ? ”

“ Philanthropy,” answered Hilda promptly. “ If you had a little toy boat you could sail it on the sea.”

“ Jan’s on the sea. I mayn’t,” said Silly.

“ Who is Jan ? ”

“ Jan’s Jan, Aunt Mary’s son. He’s littler’n me.”

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“ Are you fond of Jan ? ”

“ No. He hits me. But I’m stronger’n him.”

“ Then why don’t you hit back ? ” queried Hilda curiously, rather forgetting her mission.

“ Cos I’m stronger. ’Twouldn’t be fair.”

“ Dear me ! ” She was thoughtful for a moment.

“ That doesn’t sound a bit like other boys.”

“ Mother says I’m not like other boys. I’m silly.”

“ True,” said Hilda, thinking aloud. “ If you weren’t silly, you’d only hit what was weaker than you.”

“ I’ll remember that,” said Silly.

Then she realized that she was making a mess of things.

“ My dear boy,” she explained, “ you mustn’t mind what I say. You don’t understand.”

Silly got up. “ I’m going,” he said.

“ Where to ? ”

He pointed to a neighbouring dune.

“ I’ll come with you,” said Hilda.

The boy sat down again. “ That’s what I was going for,” he said.

She coloured violently. “ But,” she protested, “ I—I want to do something for you. Is there nothing I could do ? I—I am the Countess Hilda, you know. Is there nothing you would like ? ”

“ No,” he said. “ Yes. Scratch my back.”

The Countess recoiled. “ You can do that for yourself,” she said.

“ No, I can’t,” he said obstinately. “ I can’t reach to it.”

“ Everybody can. Try.”

Again he prepared to slouch off. The image of the Englishman rose before her—she seemed to see his smile.

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“Sit down!” she said desperately. “I’ll rub your back if you’ll listen to what I’ve got to say.”

So she moved her gloved hand to and fro across his jacket, while she preached him a brief little homily about being gentle and good and kind. He did not understand two words of it. But when she stopped for a moment—the rubbing, not the talking—he said, “Go on.”

“If you was my mother would you be good to me?” he interrupted suddenly, that consideration having penetrated his sluggish brain.

“Now had she said “No,” what had become of her homily? So she said “Yes.”

“You wouldn’t have beaten me?”

“N-no,” she replied, feeling disloyal.

“I should like to come and live with you.”

She sat silent in the face of this emergency.

“But your mother doesn’t beat you when you’re good,” she began feebly. “That’s why, as I was saying, you should always be obedient and good.”

“She beats me ’cos I’m not clever,” he answered sullenly. “Are *you* clever?”

“No,” she answered promptly. “But, of course, I know a great many things you don’t.”

“Do ye?” he said doubtfully. “I know a great many things nobody knows. I know them all myself.”

“What sort of things?”

“About the sea, and the birds, and the creeping things. They come and tell me. Mother knows nothing about ’em. She says the sea’s just the sea. And she wants to teach me to do a lot o’ things I can’t do. And they say I’m stupid.”

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"You poor fellow!" exclaimed Hilda, with tears in her eyes.

He glanced up quickly, saw them, and from that moment his whole expression changed.

"You must try and do what she tells you," continued the Countess. "People like you and me, who are not particularly clever about managing things for ourselves, cannot do better than just simply leave others to arrange everything for us."

"I don't understand," said Silly, with clouded brow.

"When you don't know what to do, do just what you're told to do. You understand that?"

"P'raps."

"You'll be much happier. You know ~~you~~ cannot find out for yourself, S——" She checked the word.

"D'ye mean to say I must do whatever she tells me?"

"Yes."

"Whew! Well, nobody spoke ever to me like you before; it sounds nice. P'raps I'll try."

"Do. Come, shall we walk home together?" She got up from the sandhill; together they strolled along the beach. He picked up a couple of shells and gave them her, common shells, such as any one might pick up, and none but a child or a fool would keep.

"Good-bye," she said, stopping, when the cottages were a few yards off.

"Why don't you call me by my name, please?" was his unexpected reply.

"Because I don't know it," she answered uncomfortably.

"Why, it's 'Silly.' You know, it's 'Silly.'"

She coloured again. "Good-bye, Silly," she said, and held out her hand, which he took awkwardly.

## "SILLY"

"Remember," she said, "and if you don't want to do what she tells you, ask God to make you want."

"P'raps." He was slouching off, when the Englishman came round the corner.

"I have been looking for you," said the Englishman. "I have an idea for this poor boy. He is to learn shrimp-catching, an easy work. Let us go and tell his mother."

So they went, and the mother was delighted at any chance of the lad's earning a trifle. Silly, too, was delighted—naturally—for the highest aspiration of his life was to get nearer than possible to the sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the evening, an hour before sundown, he started, accompanied by his younger cousin Jan. All the afternoon the pair had been busy with an old shrimp-catcher who lived near them, learning: and, though Silly still felt shaky, Jan had fully mastered the very simple trick. A net had been borrowed, and, attired in the old shrimper's oilskin bags, a sadly comic figure, Silly now sallied forth.

"Mind you don't make a fool of yourself," said his mother. "Do what Jan tells you, mind."

"I mind."

"I must go out to-night with father," said Jan importantly.

"You have plenty of time to go with Silly first. You can have a penny of what he earns," said the mother, going in.

So they trudged along the sands, to a far-away spot where no one would disturb them, and Silly went into the water, triumphantly pushing the net in front of him. It was the happiest moment of his life.

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Jan directed him from the shore with much superfluous superiority, and he drove his net along in the calm grey water, under the fading light. But they caught no shrimps.

After a time the interest began to pall. "I'll tell you what," cried Jan from the shore. "I'll just run home and get things ready. You stop here till I come back, mind."

"In the water?" cried Silly. "P'raps."

"Mind you do. I'll only be a minute. Didn't your mother say you was to do exactly as I said? If you stir I'll tell her, and she'll lick you."

"I don't mind that!" cried Silly.

"All you've got to do is to stay and catch 'em!" shouted Jan, most mindful of his penny.

"How am I to catch them? I wish I could!"

"Go in farther, you fool!" cried Jan, running off.

At his own door his father waylaid him, and, heedless of his familiar protests, sent him a mile away for some particular gin.

But Silly propelled his net through the darkening water, catching nothing.

A visitor to the village inn passed on his homeward way. He knew the boy was a simpleton, and the simpletons of this world are fair game, always.

"What are you doing there?" he questioned.

"Catching shrimps," came the answer.

"How many have you caught?"

"None."

The stranger laughed. "You don't know how to catch 'em," he said, and then an idea struck him. "You don't know what to say."

"Say?"



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"Say, of course. The shrimps won't come unless you call 'em. Every fisherman knows that. You must sing, so that they hear you——

" ' Shrimp, shrimp, come and feed,  
God grant me all my need ! ' "

" Old Kobus never told me ! "

" Then old Kobus, whoever he is, is a fool."

" But there isn't any food in the net."

" Never mind ; do you know your song ? "

" No."

And the stranger had to repeat it several times before Silly pretended to have learnt it. Then the stranger, in the twilight, laughed his way home.

Silly went on, pushing his net, and singing. What he sang was—

" Shrimp—shrimp—all my need ! "

for that was all he remembered. It grew slowly dark, and the water was very cold. He got sick of the weary labour, and pushed his way towards the shore.

Then, suddenly, the Countess Hilda's words of that morning blazed up in his mind. They were the only kind words that had ever been spoken to him by a stranger. He must always obey his mother, and his mother—or Jan in his mother's name—had ordered him to stay. He must obey Jan. He went back into the chilling water. He was very unwilling to do it, but again he remembered the Countess' words, and he said, " God, make me want ! " The stars came out. The long line of coast grew dim. The rippling waves crept forward as the tide began to turn. He pushed his net in front of him, the unwieldy oilskins clinging in lumps about his limbs. And he sang, in a weary, hesitating chant, " Shrimp—shrimp—all I need."

## " SILLY "

At the Château, in the cheerful dining-room, all lights and laughter, the young Countess Hilda smiled upon the grave philanthropist. "I am so thankful to you," she said, with sparkling eyes. "You have done a good work to-day. I feel very happy whenever I think of that poor boy: after all, you are right; there is nobody good for nothing."

In the rising water, deadly cold, with blackness all around him, but for half a dozen watching, stars, so high above, Silly pushed his empty net and sang his empty song. Sometimes he sang it low, for weariness; sometimes, when the thought of the Countess came upon him, he sang it loud, for hope. He was doing what she wished him to do. The water was all about him: it was very cold and dark and horrible—he was very frightened. But then he was only silly, and couldn't manage things—or understand. He must wait till Jan came back, and do as he was told—obey.

The water was at his throat. He stopped pushing and singing.

"Shrimp—shrimp—all I need!" And a great wave from God arose on the breast of the waters and swept over them, into stillness and peace.

For He heareth prayer.

## The Minister's Dog

THE minister stood alone beneath the falling shadows, a black speck on the long white length of lonely dyke. Before him, where the wide water had swelled bravely to greet him on his first coming to this his first charge three months ago—before him now lay the dead ice-crust, grey and still, with the still grey pall spread motionless above it, grey on grey, stillness on stillness, by the long gleam of the snow-stilled dyke.

The minister sighed, and then coughed hastily, ashamed, to himself, of the sigh. Earth and sky were very big and very empty. The minister was very young.

He was returning, with laggard step, from the steam-boat station, whither he had just escorted his mother. The mother is a pastor's widow, away in Amsterdam, vainly striving, amid the claims of five young children, to join two inelastic ends. After a Christmas-tree at home, sparsely hung, but love-lit and love-laden, she had hurried across to spend the last day of the festival with her wistful eldest. She had brought a cake and compound affection, compressed—like Liebig.

He was a three-months' minister. He had ideals. She had listened patiently to all his complainings, and she had not told him more than once that he was young

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and must learn. But she had resolutely steered his thoughts towards the sunshine, and had dilated on the lights and shadows of the other children's complicated existence, especially the lights.

The minister's brothers and sisters are of no interest to any one, excepting to themselves, and their mother, and the minister.

"I have brought you a present from the children," said the colourless little woman, rapidly passing in review the minister's scanty wardrobe. "It will come up this evening from the boat station to comfort you when I am gone."

The minister muttered the word "extravagance," and began to inquire all over again concerning Adrian, the youngest, who had hip disease, and whose Christmas present, of late years, had been an expensive visit to a Leyden professor, the painful probing of a wound.

"But this time he says it is doing splendidly," explained the little mother, beaming. "In a year or two, he says, there will only be a little lameness left."

"He will never be able to run with Nero," said the minister.

Nero was a black retriever, saved from drowning, as a pup, by the minister's sudden leap into the water—he was a student in those days—and given by him to the invalid, whom everybody petted.

"He doesn't want to run with Nero," replied the mother shortly.

The minister turned along the dyke. That morning he had preached his first Christmas sermon. It had been all about peace and goodwill.

He was thinking, as he walked, of the squabbles and

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struggles that filled the little fishing village from end to end. Three months ago he would have deemed it impossible that so much envy, jealousy, and malice could be contained in a community of twelve hundred souls, including women and children.

Oh, undoubtedly, including the women !

He reflected, as his black feet went crunching the calm snow. There were the two Doyerfeld families, well-to-do, important, all-pervading, who had never exchanged a word since, five and twenty years ago, John Doyerfeld had struck his nephew for some boyish freak. They were religious people, all of them, communicants. White-haired Pete Doyerfeld glowered at white-haired John Doyerfeld across the holy table. The quarrel was the interest and the pride of their lives.

There was the baker, Jan Blass, whose weights had been found wanting, and who, therefore, made unrelenting war on the assizer ; there were the Hockmans, who only hated their neighbours (four deep), and the Bartels, who hated everybody indiscriminately. There were all the members of the parish council, at daggers' ends about a question of tenpenny perquisites ; there was the excise-man, near the church, who restricted his animosity to church-goers, because of a vainly-contested right of way.

Amongst all these dissentients the minister had stumbled blindly. At first he had foolishly believed himself merely a spectator, till suddenly he discovered that he was exchanging blows with the whole lot of them.

Jan Blass had refused to attend church again, after the very first Sunday, because the new minister had " spoken slightly of The Blood " ; Teerling, the great smuggling contractor, had withdrawn his subscription

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to the Poor Fund because one of the Doyerfelds, and not Teerling's son, had been elected deacon ; and the old widow of Claus Hockman, that most evil-tongued of old widows, had publicly rated the "Dominie" for declaring from the pulpit that "all men may obtain salvation," thereby "making God Almighty a puppet at every sinner's beck and call."

The Dominie sighed again, and this time he forgot to cough. He was passing a trim little green-shuttered house on the outskirts of the straggling village. He hesitated.

"I shall venture this very day!" he said, half aloud. "What a coward I am! And they can't make me feel more miserable than I do."

He walked up the narrow path, between some brown rhododendron bushes, and rang the bell—an inhospitable, irresponsively shrill little ting. It was answered immediately by a female, all angles, like a vinegar cruet well filled.

"Miss Kezia Vandonderboom?" said the Dominie.

"That is my name," replied the spinster sharply, "unless you have some serious objection. It seems to me as good as any other."

Long ago the then youthful Miss Kezia had sought refuge in defiance from incessant ridicule.

The naming of his daughters had been the one stroke of humour in Jaap Vandonderboom's long hen-pecked existence. After seven years of married life twin girls had been born to this patient Job. He came back from the registrar's to his wife's bedside.

"Well?" said the wife.

"Well?" said Jaap. "I haven't given 'em the

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names we agreed on. I told 'im to call 'em Jemima and Kezia—I told 'im."

The wife sat up.

"Well, of all the fools!" she cried in a faint fury. "But, fool as you are, I don't, for the life o' me, understand."

The long-suffering husband grinned.

"No more do I," he responded, "but the registrar did."

"May I come in?" asked the Dominie.

"Oh, if you want to," said Miss Kezia, "of course."

In the parlour, by a close stove, sat Miss Jemima. She was exactly like Miss Kezia, except that, being paralysed, she always sat, while Miss Kezia, being energetic, mostly stood.

"I wanted to speak about that pew," began the young minister, after the perfunctory preliminaries.

Miss Kezia stopped him with uplifted finger by her sister's chair.

"Then you needn't," she said, "for it's no use, young man. We shall keep those two sittings till we die."

"But you know how matters stand," pleaded the Dominie. "Isaac Bartel and his wife have stayed away from service since last Easter, because their two children, that were then confirmed, can't sit in the same pew with them. There's not another vacant in the building, and your two seats adjoining theirs have not been occupied for years."

The Dominie paused; it sounded so simple, so logical.

"We shall keep those sittings till we die," said Miss Kezia. Miss Jemima nodded.

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"And *never* come to church again?" questioned the Dominie, losing strength.

"My sister Jemima can't come, for she's paralysed," responded Miss Kezia, with asperity. "And I can't come because you preach Arminianism. Jemima 'd come fast enough if she could. She's Arminian."

"It sounds very contrary," said the Dominie plaintively.

Miss Jemima intervened. "A body can't help that," said Miss Jemima. "God Almighty's ways aren't our ways. We've always been 'contraried' about our church sittings. At Wyk, where we lived before we came here, there were two ministers that preached alternate, and one was Arminian, and one was pretty well orthodox. We could only afford one sitting then, and we took it in turns. The very first Sunday we drew lots, and Kezia got first turn, and—would you believe it?—bless me if the Arminian didn't get up and preach!"

"How did you manage?" asked the Dominie, with sudden interest, his eyes a-twinkle.

"Never went to church, of course, for seven months and more, till the orthodox man had a cold in his head one Sunday, and so the turns came right."

"But surely you might have exchanged," expostulated the Dominie.

"A turn's a turn," interposed Kezia; "and hadn't we drawn lots? God Almighty's ways aren't our ways. But you won't get those two sittings from us, not if you talk till doomsday. We keep those two sittings, Jemima and I, till we exchange them for seats up above!" She pointed with corkscrew finger.

"I do believe you think there's some connexion!" cried the Dominie, aghast.



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"I don't say that. You can make a dumb book say what it don't, Dominie, but you can't a living woman. We keep our seats in church, Jemima and I; we're not heathens nor Jews, but baptized and church-member Christians, and as much as that we *can* say, with the sittings to prove it, when our day of reckoning comes!"

The Dominie rose, rather violently.

"Three florins per sitting," chimed in Miss Jemima. "Six florins per annum, paid punctually for seventeen years come next January. One hundred and two florins, and nothing to show for it. That's all I say about it. I don't go no further. What a mint of money, and nothing to show for it—on earth!"

"Isaac Bartel's empty seats to show for it!" cried the minister. "I'm not defending Bartel's behaviour. All I say is: It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come. But woe unto him through whom they come!"

"Yes; but that was addressed to the shepherds, not to the sheep," cried Miss Kezia, as she followed her pastor out into the hall. "And a very solemn warning it is to all ministers, Dominie. You're exceedingly young; but one day you'll say to yourself with tears (God grant it!): 'Woe unto him through whom offences come!'"

The Dominie hurried homewards. Over the darkening landscape damp mists fell cold. He shivered as he passed the hovel of Bram Stap, the cobbler, the village terror, from which echoed the shouts and oaths of a drunken brawl. And as he passed the respectable white house of respectable white-haired John Doyerfeld he shivered again.

In this village, according to immemorial custom, the church bell was rung at intervals throughout the Feast

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of the Nativity. He listened to it now. "Peace and goodwill," he said; "Peace and goodwill. Well, I can't help it." From the distance the parsonage twinkled across the snow. It was utterly, miserably empty.

At the door his one servant stood peering anxiously out. His mother had recently procured this person for him. It was the person's duty to be old, unattractive, self-willed, and absolutely trustworthy. She did her duty.

"Dominie! Dominie!" she cried shrilly from the step. "There's the most terrible creature arrived for you, done up in a basket! And if it's your mother that sent it, as the boatman was saying—Lord, one can't understand such goings on of so sensible-seeming a creature!"

The Dominie pushed past.

"I've been out a-perishing with cold for the last hour and a half!" continued the old lady behind him. "I couldn't 'a' ventured to stay in the house with it, for fear it should break loose. And to listen to its howlings and moanings is enough to make a body's blood turn black."

"The druggot looks strong enough," said the Dominie calmly. "You must be unusually nervous about animals, Mina." He stood in the passage, under the oil lamp, looking down upon the big basket securely covered with cloth. Scarcely had he begun to speak when the howlings ceased, and the basket heaved to and fro in a series of ungainly jumps and tossings.

"Get me a knife, please," said the Dominie. He took up an envelope addressed in his brother Adrian's boyish sprawl, and broke the seal.

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"Dear brother," said the letter, "we send you 'Nero.' We don't want him, for we're plenty company among ourselves. Besides, we couldn't keep him anyway, for there's a new dog tax to be levied next year of five florins, so mother says we should have to sell him anyway."

The letter, in the lame boy's writing, was signed by the whole family.

"Wait, Dominie, please, till I've locked myself into the kitchen," expostulated Mina, as her master began to cut the string.

He obediently hesitated, but a moment later, in the expectant silence of the narrow passage, as the drugget fell aside, the great silken mass of the black retriever poured forth in a sudden leap, all over the Dominie, upsetting him on to the floor and overflowing him, neck and shoulders, under a torrent of embraces and the constantly recurring flashes of a bright red tongue.

"Nero!" said the Dominie, "Nero! Nero! Nero!"  
That was all he said.

## II

THE New Year was four months old already. Its snowy coverlet had long ago melted away from it. Already it sat up in bed and smiled.

In the pastor's study, with its red curtains and ruddier firelight, all looked warm and cosy. On the rug lay Nero, his nose between his fore-paws, his whole soft figure shapeless with slothful repose. By the writing-table sat the Dominie, his face upon his hands, thinking.

Life was easier now for the Dominie in many ways.

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Not that his people had grown easier to handle, or that he had grown wiser in the handling, but he thought he had grown wiser, and that is a great thing. In all humility he did his best.

And Nero kept him company.

He had resolved some weeks ago, with youthful confidence, to desist from his earlier platitudes regarding evil in general, and to preach to his own congregation about their own besetting sins. He did not expect them to like it, but he expected it to do them good. He was mistaken. They liked it. Each of them liked hearing about his neighbour's sins.

To mitigate somewhat the appearance of personal allusion, he had hit on a plan which he considered ingenious. He had announced from the pulpit that a box would be placed at the church door to receive any suggestions of imperfectly comprehended texts that any member of the congregation might care to make.

The plan did not work very successfully. The minister might have taken warning from an old friend of his own grandfather's, who had laid a wager that he would preach a good impromptu sermon from any text he found upon his pulpit cushion. When the day came a scrap of paper awaited him. He took it up, saw nothing written on the one side, turned it round, saw nothing written on the other. He faced the grinning congregation with folded arms. "Nothing?" he said. "Nothing? 'Behold, thou sayest, I have need of nothing, and knowest not——' You will find my text in Revelation iii. 17"; and he poured down upon them such a stream of denunciation as singed their callosity with the very flames of hell.

On three several occasions of late, when going to un-

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lock his box, the Dominie had found it to contain the selfsame verse in varied handwriting : " Woe unto him through whom offences come."

One of the papers he knew to be Miss Kezia's ; but, then, he was not acquainted with Miss Jemima's calligraphy, nor with the pothooks and hangers of the sisters' rheumatic old maid.

" I cannot imagine what it means," said the minister to himself for the twentieth time. He gazed down on the little paper he had brought home with him that afternoon. He could not make it out at all. He knew not what to do.

So he threw himself down on the carpet and romped with Nero.

A knock at the door disturbed him. The minister disentangled himself from the canine confusion all over him, and shook out his rumpled black clothes. He wondered what his hair looked like as he called, " Come in ! "

" John Doyerfeld is asking to see you," announced Mina, who never spoke of any one as " Mynheer," " but he won't cross the threshold, he declares, till he's assured that there dog's locked up." And Mina cast a murderous glance, like a blow, at Nero, which she hated. The dog winced.

" Go into the bedroom, Nero, and shut the door after you," said his master.

The dog obeyed.

" What I want to know is this," said John Doyerfeld, standing in the middle of the room. He was very spare and neat and respectable, black-coated, white-tied, and white-haired. " What I want to know is just merely *this*—and, as an elder of the church, I have a claim to

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be answered. When you preached last Sacrament Sunday about leaving one's gift before the altar, did you mean *me* ? ”

“ I meant every one who has not forgiven his brother. So did Christ. All the worse for you, John Doyerfeld, if you are one of those Christ meant.”

“ Dominie, you are insolent ! ”

“ So, then, was my Lord and Master,” cried the young minister, white to the lips.

“ Hold your tongue ! ”

“ And an elder in Israel bade them smite Him on the mouth.”

John Doyerfeld grasped his hat tight.

“ That ever I should live,” he said, turning away, “ to hear blasphemy in this house from a minister of the Gospel ! Well, well, truly hath our Saviour spoken : ‘ It is impossible but that offences should come ! ’ ” He hesitated by the door. “ Is that villanous dog of yours safely out of the way ? ” he asked.

The Dominie nodded, unable to speak.

The oft-repeated text, striking him once again from John Doyerfeld's lips, seemed to weigh down his soul with a sudden blast of approaching misfortune.

He went back to the dog, but his attention was distracted. Till now he had found refuge in the supposition that all the papers in the box might be traceable to Miss Kezia, for was it not to her that he had unwarily quoted the fatal words ? but others, evidently, applied them to him. Who ? Why ? The air seemed full of indefinite menace.

“ Nero, old boy, I do believe they dislike you as much as they do me ! ” he said, shaking his head to his companion's uplifted gaze. “ I suppose it's a case of ‘ love

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me, love my dog,' inverted. 'The opposites of equals are equals.' That's Euclid, or ought to be. You've a very bad name, Nero ; mind you don't live up to it." He went to get the dog some supper, for Nero had of late grown dissatisfied with regular meals. Now again he sniffed at the food, but left it untasted. He whined, before a familiar cupboard, for rusks.

Suddenly the minister grew anxious about his dog. Suddenly he realized that he had been anxious for some time. Nero was not his old self ; he was dejected, even occasionally morose, though he would always repent, with overwhelming display of affection, whenever he seemed temporarily to hold aloof. The minister scrutinized his despondent expression where he sat with drooping lids, his eyes drawn back to his ears. "I wonder whether he is lonely and misses all the others," thought the minister. "It certainly wouldn't be surprising if he did." He knew that the dog could never be sent back to Adrian. The new dog tax had indeed made it impossible for the widow to retain him.

He waved his hands away from his face as one who gasps for breath. "Come !" he cried, and, rushing from the house, raced with the dog to the village through the breezy spring night, till he saw the lights drawing nearer, and remembered he was a minister.

He turned down a side lane, to the doctor's little yellow house. The doctor was a jovial, Burgundy-nosed bachelor, a sceptic, and the one man with whom the minister could enjoy an honest, open dispute.

"Dear me, is it only you ?" said the doctor, turning lazily, in his shabby dressing-gown, from his grog, as the parson burst in upon him, "I thought it was some grand

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case of over-eating among the Doyerfelds, good for ten florins, at least."

"Doctor, can you see if a dog is ill?" replied the Dominie abruptly.

"No, of course not. We doctors know nothing about animals; animals have nothing in common with 'the human form divine.' Oh, of course not! All you theologians know that."

"What is the matter with Nero, then?"

Immediately the doctor became serious, and, with the Dominie's assistance, he felt the patient's pulse, and examined the whites of his eyes and his tongue.

"There's nothing much the matter with the brute," said the doctor. "He's a little out of sorts, and I'll give you a draught to clear the system. But, I'll tell you what's the trouble, if you really want to know. Like most of us, he's growing old and cantankerous. That's a disease no medicine can cure."

"He isn't in the least cantankerous," replied the Dominie vehemently. "His temper's that of an angel. He's never even bitten Mina."

The doctor eyed him curiously. "Have you never heard that this kind of big dog is apt to turn crusty with time?" he said. "You haven't, have you? Well, better look out. If I might recommend a remedy, it would be a drastic one. I should say, 'Change of air!'"

"What do you mean?" cried the minister, growing hot.

"Change of air—you know. I don't fancy this sea-board agrees with him. Send him somewhere else."

The Dominie stared for a moment, then found that he was too angry to reply, and rushed away.

The doctor settled down to his glass. "Never give



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advice," he soliloquized. "But what's the use of saying that to a medical man? Poor Dominie, he'll hear it on all sides to-morrow."

The Dominie went to bed in a huff, and woke up in a bad temper.

He was pottering about in his little vegetable garden, when suddenly a dark shadow intervened between him and the feeble April sun. Looking up, he saw Miss Kezia Vandonderboom.

"I want the price of those chickens, please," said Miss Kezia in a voice like a whiplash.

"My housekeeper pays for things," replied the young minister loftily. "But I haven't had any fowl since I came."

Miss Kezia turned green. "Do you take me for your butterwoman, Dominie?" she said. "I don't need to sell anything, thank Heaven. But I'm not going to have my and my sister's chickens chased by your brute of a dog without getting paid for the damage."

"Nero?" cried the Dominie, white and sick. "Does Nero chase your chickens?"

"Your dog does, whatever his evil name may be! And you a Christian pastor, calling your dog after the Babylonish tyrant! I dare say he's going mad, like that monster went: howsoever, *he* don't eat grass, but chickens!"

"I will pay for the damage. How much is it?" said the Dominie, hoping it was not much. He went in, to his desk.

The sight of silver softened Miss Kezia. "Ah! Dominie," she exclaimed, shaking her head, "how truly I warned you, more truly than I could have ventured to think, that you would come to mourn the causing of

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offences ! Take my advice, Dominie : shoot that dog ! ”

He turned on her. “ It was you that put that text into the box,” he said. “ How often, I should like to know ? ”

“ Three times,” replied Miss Kezia promptly. “ I, and Jemima, and Jane.”

He bowed her out ceremoniously, and then summoned Nero to his presence. He stood looking down on the dog, and the dog sat looking down on the floor.

“ Nero, Nero ! ” said the Dominie, “ I wonder how much more you have on your conscience. Would it be any use, I wonder, changing your evil name ? Supposing I were to give you a fresh start as ‘ Paul ’ ? ”

Nero guiltily wagged his tail. Then, like the lonely young fool he was, the young minister stooped and kissed the culprit’s smooth black head.

There was thunder in the air. An irresistible disquiet impelled him to go out into the village, down to the church, and the text-box. He took the dog with him, being resolved never in the future to let the animal out of his sight, unless he locked it up.

“ No, we shall not part, Nero,” he said. “ If it be true that your high-day is over, all the more reason for me to stick to you in your decay. Besides, to whom could I dispose of you ? No, we shall not part.”

It seemed to him, as he passed along the village street, that the people eyed him with malevolence. He remembered having noticed this before of late. He told himself that it did not matter much. He could never hope, anyhow, to conciliate the Doyerfelds, and the Hockmans, and all the numerous saints of his congregation. He yearned for a downright sinner like himself.

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The dog slunk behind him. People whispered and pointed to the dog. A mother drew away her toddling baby with frightened face. A little boy, safe behind a railing, threw stones.

The minister unlocked the text-box. There were two papers in it with the accusatory words. One of these was in John Doyerfeld's handwriting.

The minister walked back reflectively, speculating as to who could have written the other. He resolved to take down the box, which was becoming an obsession. And he abused himself for a coward.

He was roused from his reverie by an outburst of shrieks and revilings. He looked back hastily; he had just turned a corner; the dog had disappeared.

He ran back. An excited crowd was forming by one of the cottages. The Dominie plunged into the midst of it. An unkempt creature, the tears coursing white down her dirty cheeks, knelt by the roadside, straining to her ragged breast an equally dirty, howling child. A chorus of ragged, loud-voiced sympathy went up all around them.

The Dominie recognized Mie Stap the drunken cobbler's wife, just as her husband, the bully, burst in among the rapidly receding spectators.

"Bitten the child, has he?" shouted the cobbler. "Let me get at him, the great hulking brute, or his sneak of a master! Ah, there you are, are you?" he continued in a lower tone, suddenly espying the Dominie's black coat. "Your dog's bitten my child and nearly killed it, and I'll shoot him—I swear I will—the first time he comes my way."

"No, you will not," replied the Dominie. "Let me see what I can do for the child."

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The child was undeniably wounded, though not severely. At sight of the blood across its arm a shriek went up on all sides. It had chased the dog, flinging stones, and the dog had bitten it.

The Dominie's calm words infuriated his antagonist. "I shall shoot him and thrash you first, you yellow-faced parson!" shouted the cobbler, all the early drink in him mounting to his own purple visage. "What d'ye mean, coming here, preaching peace in the pulpit o' Sundays, and prowling about the place all the rest o' the week with that murderous brute, like a beast of prey? The whole village wishes it were rid of you and your dog, that it does! And no chickens nor children safe in the streets for fear of the parson's little pet! I'm a better friend to the village than the parson, and, by G—, I'll make you kill that dog yourself!"

They had drawn back into the yard by the cobbler's hovel. The curious crowd clustered, at a respectful distance, round the entry.

"Peace, drunkard!" said the Dominie, standing motionless: "I dare you to touch the dog or me." He folded his arms.

"Ah, you've easy daring," replied the cobbler, "with that ravening dog behind you to help you to speak bold!" And, indeed, the minister felt Nero, at that moment, timidly rubbing against his legs. He dragged the dog into an outhouse and bolted him in.

"Now!" he said, coming back. "I'm very, very sorry for what's happened, but I'm not afraid of you, Bram Stap, and so I tell you. You won't get anything out of me by bluster. I shall do with my own dog what I choose."

The cobbler calmed down before the other's quiet

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tones. "No offence," he said, slouchingly, "no offence, Doiminie, but when a man loves his children as I do——

"He spends all his earnings in drink," interrupted the Domnie. He deliberated a full minute. The crowd outside wondered what would happen next. "If I send the dog away," said the Dominie at last, cautiously reading the man he had to deal with, "it shall be of my own free will ; and to prove that it is, I make my conditions. If I send the dog away this week, you, Bram Stap, shall come to church next Sunday, sober. Do you agree ? "

"Oh, I agree," replied the cobbler roughly. "Send the dog away, and how do you know I'll keep my share ? "

"Because a man may be a drunkard and a bully, and yet not altogether a blackguard," replied the Dominie ; "because I think you'd like to prove you're not."

"This, at least, is a sinner," thought the Dominie bitterly. "He doesn't quote texts."

He turned on his heel and went to release the dog. When they reached the parsonage together, he locked his study door, and sat long into the afternoon, heedless of the old woman's calls to luncheon, his hand against Nero's glossy neck.

In the evening, as the shadows began to lengthen across the wastes of water, the Dominie and his dog passed slowly down the village, on their way to the landing-place.

The villagers gathered at their doors and along the street, and watched. The Dominie looked neither to right nor left, avoiding all salutations. The dog drooped, head and tail.

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"Well, it's a mercy you spoke up as you did, Bram Stap," said one of the cobbler's boon companions; "I could see he saw you meant what you said. And a precious funk he's in—no wonder!"

The cobbler turned upon the speaker with an oath. "Hold your tongue," he said, "or I'll knock your ugly eyes out."

The minister went on along the dyke, where the broad estuary once more swelled and glittered—away from the village—into the loneliness. By the landing-place the little steamer lay puffing. The minister had telegraphed to a friend in Friesland who, living on a lonely moor, had lately been in search of a watch-dog. He led Nero on to the deck. He did not dare to take leave of him. He knew that the dog understood.

Away, into the unending distance the steamer, turning slowly, steered its course. The grey heaven sank lower and lower, leaden-coloured, leaden-weighted, upon the leaden water. The Dominie stood on the dyke.

Suddenly a long, long-drawn howl arose upon the evening air.

## Tom Potter's Pilgrimage

**F**AR astray on the desolate moor, far beyond the last faint indications of human sociability, beyond the farthest public-house that stands, an outpost, to catch the distant wanderer, far beyond, with miles of loneliness all around it, Tom Potter's cottage sleeps, turf-covered, among the motionless waves of turf. Nobody ever comes near it, except the rabbits or, once in a way, the Baron's officious gamekeeper—to see if old Tom Potter be not yet dead.

But he isn't dead. He has no intention of dying. He has talked about the thing so often, these last twenty years, he was forgotten to do it.

He is past eighty—ten years past, he says, but that is an old man's haste to attain a hundred. He never had any relations or connexions of any kind. The villagers say he has always lived out on the moor.

On a silver summer evening, a night so soft and silent that even a snuffy old gaffer sees the stars and the glow-worms, Tom Potter sat in front of his hovel, smoking. That afternoon, on the dusty high-road, he had picked up an untouched cigar, just dropped by a passing cyclist; with reckless honesty he had shouted to stop the tourist, who, suspecting mendicancy, had swiftly sailed away. Such an event had never occurred before, and was most

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unlikely to occur again ; yet, henceforth, on his daily trudge, Tom Potter would dream, eyes downward, of wealthy swells and noblemen sowing tobacco along an old man's cheerless path. Not noblemen. Tom Potter belonged to the past : the gentleman cyclist, paddling his own legs for pleasure, was a thing you heard of, and disbelieved.

But from Tom Potter's modest standpoint almost all men are moderately wealthy. The men, for instance, who owns two pigs. As he sat, laboriously reflective, he wondered at the thought of countless numbers who could lightly lose a whole cigar. There was no invidiousness about the wonder. Providence had willed these natural inequalities. Tom Potter belonged to the past.

During the last fifty years he had asked for nothing but daily work for daily food. The work had decreased with failing strength, but so had the need of nourishment. In youth the gates of all the senses swing open to enjoyment ; Tom Potter, in his day, had seen the riotous train sweep, loud, across his soul. But that was more than fifty years ago, miles away, almost in another life ; nobody know anything about it.

The one thing he dreaded was cold. A little hunger had its compensations ; it is the best of sauces, until you let it burn ; it is also the best of restoratives when the muscles refuse to work. A little thirst cannot do much worse than disturb your temperate potatoes. But cold—cold—with infirmities increasing and inadequate peat, and shivers even in the aimless summer breezes—cold, that was what he dreaded, the poor man's silent foe. The hovel was a ruin ; a hundred draughts swept through its many cracks. He, too, was a ruin,



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its aged occupant, and the draughts pierced now where they had never pierced before.

But this night, at any rate, no chill would strike upon the mellow air. And yet, in spite of comfort, of contentment, in spite of treasure trove, Tom Potter's meditations were the saddest he had known through all these fifty uneventful years.

For, that very morning the village doctor had answered a question become inevitable. The old man was right. The trouble at his heart—the sudden catch, the spasm—was the slow beginning of the end. Tom Potter must abandon the little jobs which still kept body and soul together. It wasn't a matter of life and death; he simply couldn't do them, the miserable odds and ends. He must apply, at last, for outdoor relief.

"And long may you enjoy it!" said the doctor, with rough good-nature.

"Ay, I shall live to be a hundred," answered Tom. That was his standing, oft-repeated joke; for the first time it seemed to have lost its laugh.

Like all men of his class, he had the smallest opinion of the doctor. If the poor believe in anything, it is quacks. Expensive quacks. But he knew that the doctor spoke truth, because he had known it before the doctor spoke. He couldn't work any more. He would never be able to work again. Well, he was past eighty, and last year he had owed no man anything, not even the Burgomaster's Christmas present of tobacco, for had he not done an errand for the Burgomaster's wife?

He rebelled fiercely against the idea of parish relief. He felt that this was absurd of him; so few people mind it. The doctor would have thought the fancy most extravagant; the doctor had no experience—outside

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romance, for he closed his eyes—of beggars who didn't choose—to be helped. But here was the last relic of Tom Potter's handsome, stalwart, tempestuous youth. He was strong in himself, headstrong, strong of arm, all-sufficient. He owed no man anything—no, nor God.

He set his toothless gums hard, mumbling the delicacy his quick eye had gained for him—a quick eye at eighty-five!—many a young fellow of twenty was not half as fit for work as he—Pah! A wicked look settled on his face. He was thinking, very sluggishly, of his own long-buried youth, of the climax, away yonder, in the noisy seaport, the sudden end of the beginning, as he called it, he who had now come to the slow beginning of the end.

He had been a first-rate seaman, able-bodied, stout of heart, but wild. Before he ran away to sea, he had deserved his mother's thrashings; she was always drunk, however, when she thrashed him, and that precludes discipline. He had not been drunk, now, for more than fifty years. His drunkenest fit had been the last, on that day when his wife ran away from him, back to the man he had stolen her from, her bridegroom, his messmate, ten years his junior. She was a bad lot, his wife, and a lady too, a doctor's daughter, sunk to be a barmaid. She had run from Piet Jansen before she died—quite a girl, poor thing! But the child was safe enough, little Anthony, taken by respectable relations of the mother's, properly cared for. The father, burrowing into oblivion away on the moor, had never lost sight of the child. He had looked on his whole career from the outset, watching it vaguely, as well as he could. Whenever Anthony rose a step higher on the ladder he climbed

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so securely, Piet Jansen would write from Amsterdam. Piet Jansen, poor fool ! Tom was supposed to have gone to sea, immediately on his wife's desertion, with a ship that foundered. Only his rival, happily married to a fairly thriving rag-shop, knew of his existence " in the desert, like a baboon." Sometimes Tom Potter wondered why this man, who hated him, wrote of Anthony's continuous success, but he was shrewd enough to hazard an explanation : Piet Jansen believed every letter to be a stab. Tom Potter would gladly have paid for each, if necessary, in blood.

There came a time when the newspapers supplemented these epistles, then a time when they supplanted them. The villagers knew little of the wild man of the moors ; they were amused to find him suddenly frequenting public-houses, amazed to see him sitting there, and not even getting drunk. You went to a tavern for the business of drinking or the pleasure of discourse ; the wild man came to read the paper ! His eagerness about it became a constant source of fun, but behind his back, which was broad and resolute, like the eagle-featured, sunburnt face, people asked each other with a wink, what Tom expected to find there—an unknown legacy, or a nomination as Minister ?

When Anthony was struck down by swift disease in the midst of his prosperity, Tom Potter made no sign. He left off going to the public-house. He wasted a whole evening shaping a little black rosette out of a bit of old black ribbon ; wasted, for when the rosette was ready he took it off his cap again, and flung it into the fire. Why should he mourn for a son he had never seen ? Yes, once, in a comic cartoon he had found his portrait and fancied a strong resemblance to himself. He had

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resisted the yearning to buy the picture. Well, now the whole thing was over. There were children, he knew—the rich wife's children: they were no farther, no nearer, than the dead man, his son.

He mustn't have parish relief—not parish relief! He had never owed any man anything. He got up and faced the darkly-glowing heavens. He was eighty-five years old, and his son had died at fifty! The self-same stars looked down on a mansion many miles away—in another province, several hours off by train—he had never seen it, knew nothing of it. To old men death is easiest; to them it doesn't come.

Parish relief means inquiries. His shrivelled cheek burned a dusky red. No, that doesn't matter; he was safe enough there. Pride had driven him from the child of his shame and had kept him from the child of his glory. It was false to say that he disgraced his descendants by the acceptance of parish relief. He owed nothing to any man. Not even to his son's children an honourable past.

His son's children. The beginning of the end. He could think of nothing else. His eyes turned southwards, as they had so often turned, for fifty years, by night and day. Not parish relief!

The cigar dropped from between his lips. He stooped down, and dusted it carefully against his shabby sleeve, and stuck it back again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Through the beautiful beechwoods of Varenslø their fortunate owner, Everard Plas Potter, strolled home in the summer twilight. He was tranquilly contented with himself and his surroundings, modestly conscious of his position, a man under thirty, enjoying excellent

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health, possessed of a beautiful place in the country, and already a Member of the States-Provincial. He had married wealth, like his father, and, unlike his father, love ; for the father by doing as much as he could had enabled the son to do more. On the pedestal of the father's strenuous erecting the son stood serene. The father had never seen the scaffolding down ; the son wished the pedestal higher. But he was very well satisfied with it, all the same.

He had been down to the village himself, to send a telegram. To-morrow was his only sister's birthday ; he had telegraphed acceptance of an invitation to dinner ; it was the first birthday since her marriage to an officer of rank in the neighbouring garrison town. The postmaster had been obsequiously regretful that Mynheer's letters should just have gone up to the house. Mynheer dawdled at the side-gate, waiting to catch the postman. He would like to see Marian to-morrow at the head of her table. Hers was just the kind of match that would have pleased papa.

The postman stood before him, cap in hand. Mynheer took the little packet and walked towards the house. There was a note from a friend about an appointment, which he scanned in the dusk ; and, furthermore, there were the newspapers, a couple of letters for the servants, a bill, a begging letter. These he thrust into his pocket ; he hesitated about the begging letter—should he tear it up unopened ? The lamp was lighted in the back drawing-room ; he went in.

His wife was busy at the tea-table.

" Is Anthony asleep ? " he asked, speaking of their only child, a boy of five. Anthony was safe asleep, well, as always ; he had gone to bed amid roars of laughter.

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Three dogs lay under the tea-table ; one of them yawned and stretched his legs.

" How fat Tub grows ! " said Everard ; " he gets too much to eat."

His wife looked across at him, laughing.

" That is a common complaint in this house," she replied. " Just look at cook, and John ! And you and I oughtn't to throw stones."

" I don't eat too much," he said, throwing himself into a chair. " Unless you mean sauces ? I must admit I do like a good French sauce. And your mother's receipts are excellent."

" Mamma got them from her uncle, the Consul," said the lady, arranging her little blue cups, " and his was a lifelong experience."

" I know, I know," he answered. He lay back, consciously enjoying the comfort around him, and therefore began talking of their little household troubles. A good servant leaving, the gardener's wife again ailing—that mysterious breakage of a vase in the boudoir. It was pleasant to reflect you had nothing worse to fret over. Nor did they fret unreasonably, pleasantly occupied with themselves, their lives, the welfare of those around them.

" Another begging letter—evidently," he said daintily poising the dirty missive between finger and thumb. " Well, it can't be helped. I may as well open it, and see if it's worth attending to."

" The poor must beg, and the rich must give," she answered, gently. " That seems quite natural."

He smiled, opening the envelope. " A good woman's social economy ! " he said. " And a good woman's social economy is always all wrong." He began reading, with

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the smile on his face, but the first words of the letter swept it away.

"High and Nobly Born Sir," said the letter. "Your High Nobleness is a very fine gentleman, and you live very grandly, as your father did before you. But did your father ever tell you—or did he not?—that *his* father, a common sailor, that married a bad woman, who left him, lives in a miserable hovel in want of daily bread—lives there still, without food or clothing, though he's ninety years old? Does your Mighty Nobleness know that or not? I see your name in all sorts of charity lists (your father was more in the political line), but how about your own flesh and blood, as the Bible says—and it's bitter cold of nights, and not having enough to eat!—Your friend,

"X."

"Well?" said his wife.

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied hastily, and, crumpling the letter in his hand, he walked out on to the verandah.

He knew nothing of this. Before God, he knew nothing. His father, the early orphaned son of a sea-captain, had been brought up by relations on the mother's side, who had always abused the dead sailor, perhaps because he had really been as bad as they loved to paint him, perhaps because his naval captaincy had been in the merchant service. But the relations themselves had been essentially middle-class: such people make subtle divisions, so Anthony Potter had always argued to himself and to his son. He, Anthony, had worked himself up with a will, studying, as a notary clerk, to take his University degree; he had married the rich notary's ugly daughter—married young, for the daughter was old—had pushed himself forward in the town he lived in, had talked himself into Parliament, had become a power

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in council because he could talk more fluently than most men about things he didn't understand, had talked much about most things, but little of his family history. What he knew he had told. Of course their origin was humble. Everard, luxuriously educated, thoroughly accomplished married to a charming wife, was aware of that fact, and content to let it rest. He believed his father's parents—a merchant captain, and a doctor's daughter—to have been dead for something like fifty years. He had always been told so.

And now—a common sailor, and alive ! Hunger, and thirst, and cold ! He looked up at the stars above him, and wondered if they, at this moment, were calmly shining down on the hovel and the old man. A common sailor—oh, never mind that just now ! Hunger and cold ! Well, at any rate, the nights were not cold in August. He smiled, bitterly.

He believed the whole story at once, in spite of the stupid piling up the agony. To his lips it tasted true. Nobody had ever told him ; that was his great feeling of injury. He was willing to believe his father had not known, and therein he judged rightly. Nor had Anthony willingly spoken of his mother, from a vague dread of something wrong.

Who, then, had written this letter, and why ? Not any one desirous of benefiting the old man, or further particulars would have been given. Some meaningless enemy, therefore, secret and spiteful. Why should he have enemies ? And why should these hold a secret unknown to himself ?

A shivery discomfort seized on him. He despaired of discovering where the attack came from. But one thing he was resolved to do. He must consult the family



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solicitor—must attempt, by all means in his power, to find out his grandfather. But then, why, again, did the old man remain in hiding? What secret shame hung over their heads? He would never know. The name was no unusual one. He had not a scrap of information to start with. He foresaw, rightly, that he would never be able to trace the old man against his will.

"What a beautiful night!" said his wife, coming out on the verandah.

"Yes," he answered; and after a long silence—

"How happy we are," she murmured. "How good God is! I am so glad to think that Marianne, also, is happy now."

"Yes," he answered; then, suddenly—

"I can't go to Marianne to-morrow," he said. "I must go to Amsterdam on business. I couldn't be back in time."

"To Amsterdam?" she repeated, with only surprise in her voice. "You never go to Amsterdam—such a horrible, noisy place! And I didn't think you ever had any business!"

He laughed irritably. "Oh, it's some charity business," he said.

"In connexion with that begging letter? Dear me, what an important letter! You get so many."

He did not answer. He had never had a secret from her. He hated secrets and all unpleasantness. How could he disgrace her? And his sister? A pauper grandfather! A common sailor! Pooh, what a coward he was!

"I've got a headache and am going to bed," he said; but he repented the words, though they were true. A headache was a catastrophe in that comfortable house—

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hold, and all ordinary means were available for making a sick man worse.

When he awoke from restless morning slumber, the night's resolution remained unchanged. Though he felt that the search was a hopeless one, it must be undertaken at all costs.

He drove off to the station in his dogcart, the boy, Anthony, accompanying him so far. The mother half reproachful, half quizzical, kissed her hand to them between the laurels and rhododendrons of the drive.

"Talk to me, papa," said Anthony twice, accustomed to a flow of merry unmeaning chatter. But the father only answered in monosyllables.

Before the little country station, white and red against the sun-filled road and sky, the usual knot of country people stood. They all touched their caps as the carriage drove up, and remained courteously contemplative, closely watching every movement of "the gentry" in various attitudes of respect. Usually the Lord of the Manor enjoyed this constant atmosphere of deference; to-day he hurried past the bowing station-master, then turned back to send a telegram to his sister explaining his desertion.

An old man, sitting on a bench, half rose, laboriously and with instinctive submission stood cap in hand.

"What a poor-looking old man!" whispered the child, early trained to easy pity. "How tired and poor he looks, papa!" The child was yellow-haired and chubby, in bare legs and a sailor suit.

"Does he? So he does," said the father, carelessly. "Is the telegram right? Thank you. Here, Tony, you can give the old man the change." Then a sudden pang struck his heart; he called the child back. His thought

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was of another old man, lost for ever in the seething mass of the world's misery, out yonder, in the hovel somewhere on the desolate moor.

"Here, give him this," he said, and put a gold piece in the child's hand.

The old man on the bench looked up in amazement. He made as if he would have rejected the proffered coin ; he held it on his worn palm for a moment, gazed at the bright face opposite, gazed down on the gold piece. For once his pride gave way ; he could not affront the innocent child.

"Thank you, little master," he said, humbly, closing his fingers.

The boy ran after his father, across to another platform : the Amsterdam train was just coming in.

"Who are they ?" asked the old man, eagerly, of a porter lounging near.

"They ?" repeated the porter, with the usual local wonderment at the stranger's ignorance. "That's Mr. Plas Potter, of Varenslo. The Lord of the Manor."

The old man let him move off to ring a bell and come back again. Then he said, "Great people, I suppose ?"

"I believe you. The greatest people in these parts. Very wealthy. And charitable, as you saw."

The old man winced.

"And the lady," continued the porter, "a real great lady, as ever you saw. Affable to the poor, and condescending, not like your upstarts of yesterday."

"They've been here long ?" questioned the old man, wistfully.

"I believe you," said the porter again. "Been here as long as I can remember. And his father before him, I've heard. The old Lord was a Member of Parliament."

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The stranger put no more questions. Presently the porter said—

“ You look regular done up.”

“ Yes, I came a long way. I tramped two-thirds.”

“ What did you come for ? ”

“ I had business. It's done. I'm going back by railway, though.”

The Amsterdam train had steamed away. The boy was coming back, beside the station-master.

“ Going north, then, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes ; this'll take me, won't it ? ” He opened his hand and showed the gold piece.

“ Deary, yes ; take you all over the country. Whew ! did they give you that ? ”

The old man's sallow cheek turned brown.

“ No,” he stammered. “ Yes—yes—they're generous people, as you say. Good people. A real gentleman born and bred. You're lucky to have such people at Varenslo. Good day, little master. God bless you ! good day.”

He sat watching the child get into the dogcart ; sat watching the carriage glide slowly down the dusty sunlit road.

“ That old man said ‘ God bless you,’ ” remarked Tony gravely, to the groom who was driving him. “ That was because papa gave him a gold piece, you know.”

## “ The Trick ”

THEY were making love, under the great black shadow of the broad-beamed fishing-smack. The twilight hung around them in ashen folds ; the air lay still, but their love-making, as that of sea folk should be, was stormy, like a winter sky.

“ ’Tis no manner of use,” he said at last, with a gasp. “ Your father’ll never consent while your Cousin Govert lives.”

“ *Your* Cousin Govert,” fiercely retorted the girl.

“ Well, yes. My cousin, and yours. He’s the only bond between us.”

“ The only bond ! ” angrily repeated the girl.

He kissed her as a storm-wind strikes, too suddenly, across the branches.

“ The only relation we have in common, I mean.”

“ And, pray, am I to remain a spinster,” she asked proudly, “ until Govert chooses to marry—or die ? ”

“ I suppose so, for unless he marries you, he will die unmarried.”

“ We have talked of these things before, Simon ; we have got into a way of believing them. I wonder how much of them is true ? ”

“ More than you would wish—or I. Hush ! Everything is true. Since yesterday night I know everything.”

## THE TRICK

"What, in the name of goodness, do you mean?"

"In the name of goodness, little. Listen. Put your head down here. Last night I stopped Govert suddenly on the sands, in the dark, and asked him. He told me at once. It is just as we have always fancied. His aunt left him all her money—the two smacks, the four cottages, for the property came from his family—but she made him promise to make a will bequeathing it all to me, her sister's son, in case he should die unmarried."

"And, of course, he has kept the promise."

"Why 'of course'?"

"Because that is just like Govert. And it's just like you to question why. Never mind. Simon, I love you; I don't care twopence for Govert. And so he will die unmarried, and you will be rich some day."

"No, he will marry you. Put down your head."

"Thank you, I prefer to hold it up. Simon, I understand my father; I should act as he does. I pity him deeply. And——"

"Yes?"

"And I disobey him."

Again he caught her in his arms, and kissed her furiously.

"It is madness," he said, "delightful, celestial madness! You are only nineteen. The law forbids you to marry without his consent before you are thirty; you can't wait eleven years!"

"What is eleven years? A moment."

"Nor I."

The air struck cold. She shivered. "If you were Govert," she said in a low voice, "he would give his consent to-night."

## THE TRICK

"I not being Govert, but only Govert's heir, he will give his consent—to Govert—to-morrow."

"I will refuse!" she cried vehemently.

He smiled. "All girls say that," he answered. "It's a very old story. But when it comes to the point—the beating and bullying and turning out of doors—they do as they are bid."

"Simon, you know too much; you talk too well for a common sailor."

"I am not a common sailor; I was second mate, as you know. It's a manlier occupation than taking out excursionists at so much an hour. Sometimes I think I'll start fishing, like Govert."

"Govert's got a smack."

The words stung him. "Two smacks," he said.

She made no direct rejoinder.

"If you were Govert," she said at length in a whisper, "he would give his consent to-night."

"What *do* you mean?"

She faced round at him, where they lay, interlaced, under the looming hull.

"I don't know. Do you?"

"No."

"Then let's talk of something else." She shook herself free. "Let's try that binding business again, Simon. You didn't give me time the other night. Why, it's only a sort of puzzle! If you only leave me alone for a bit, I know I shall be able to get loose."

He laughed, and rising to his feet, a stalwart figure, he went along the vessel's side, looking for a bit of rope. The other day he had amused and annoyed her with this trick of binding your hands and bidding you undo them—quite an easy matter, if only you saw how.

## THE TRICK

"An English sailor taught it me," he said, "out in Demerary; it's as simple as anything. There, Janna, I've got you now." He slipped the noose over her strong young wrists. "Look, I could do what I liked with you!" And he made as if he would have slapped her cheek.

"I don't mind that," she said, but she struggled to free herself. "I like feeling that I'm in your power and that you've bound me." But she struggled all the more to free herself. "Now, at this moment, Simon, if you was wanting to kill me, I could only close my eyes—so." She suited the action to the words, sinking back, a faint smile on her lips.

"Good-even!" said a man's voice in front of them. Govert Stendal stood beyond the shadow of the boat. "What's the joke?" he asked, and his voice was bright, unlike their tones, which had been soft and bitter.

"Simon has chained me," said Janna defiantly, "and see, he holds me chained."

"I will release you!" cried Simon's rival, with assurance: he knelt in the sand; he tugged fiercely at the rope.

"You are hurting me. That is all," said the girl coolly.

Simon smiled. Govert set his teeth, and blood sprang here and there from his fingers.

"Don't you think you had better give it up?" asked Simon.

The other leapt from the sand and struck his tormentor a full blow across the face.

"Hit him back!" cried the girl, also springing to her feet, and swaying in the uncertainty of her balance.



## THE TRICK

"Hit him instantly, Simon, you coward! Unloose me! let me get at him! I'll hit him. Oh, Govert, I love you for doing that!"

"For that only?" he asked mournfully.

She turned on him at once. "Did you want me to love you for your money?" she said.

"You do not love me at all," he made answer.

She would have retorted, but her father's sudden appearance prevented her.

"Get you home, Janna," commanded her father. "What means this unseemly exhibition? Oh, Govert is with you, I see. Your sister spoke only of Simon."

"The little spy!" said Janna between her teeth.

"You know what I told you I should do to you if ever I found you alone with Simon. You hear me, Simon Parr, you pauper!"

"Hush, father!"

"What! Is my own daughter to bid me hush? I'm the biggest smack-owner in Holst. Do you hear me, Simon Parr? And my daughters are not for the likes of you. What's the nonsense about this string? Undo it!"

"Let Govert undo it," said Simon sullenly.

"I can't," muttered Govert.

"Do, and you shall marry me," taunted Janna. "Father, you wouldn't make me marry a man that couldn't even untie another's lover's knot?"

Old Roskam had been eyeing his daughter's bound hands in the half-light. "Pooh!" he said. "Govert'll tie you a faster knot than that, girl." She stepped away from under his extended fingers. "I'll marry the man who unties my knot," she cried. "I'll marry the man who unties my knot!"

## THE TRICK

A smile which she could not see crept over her father's face. "So you shall," he answered smoothly. "But, mind you, no tricks! Keep with me. You shall go out with us in the smack to-night. 'Tis glorious weather for fishing. And, by-and-bye, before you go to sleep, Govert shall have another try at Simon's knot."

"I'll keep it till then!" exclaimed the girl. "No one shall touch it except the man who unties it. Promise me, father—all fair!—I may marry the man that unties my knot?"

Old Roskam laughed aloud. "You may," he said. "The matter shall be decided to-night; but, by Jove! you're too partial to Simon." He drew the scared Govert aside. "Keep silent," he whispered hurriedly. "I know that trick. I learnt it years ago in Demerary."

Janna gazed triumphantly at Simon. "Well," he said, "you told me nobody could possibly discover how to do it. Oh, Simon, you heard father! He's passionate and unreasonable, but—but, Simon—he keeps his word."

"I don't believe it. I don't trust your father. And, besides, Janna, what's the use? Govert's got the money anyhow."

"Was it the money you was thinking of?"

"No, not the money. But your father 'll never allow me to marry you—and me a pauper; you heard him say it. He's fooling you!"

"Father's unreasonable, but father keeps his word."

"He's playing you a trick of some kind. He's playing you a trick."

"It's you that plays tricks!" she cried, laughing happily, and held up her twisted hands.

"Janna, if Govert were dead—supposing he died to—

## THE TRICK

night, I should have the smacks, and the houses, and everything."

"Yes, but he isn't dead, nor likely to die."

Janna, he's made the will he promised to. I know he has."

"He's a stronger man than you, Simon. I wished you'd hit him back."

"I'll hit him back, Janna, never you fear. If a man's hands were bound like yours are, Janna, another man could do with him what he liked."

"Fie! You wouldn't hit a man whose hands were bound!" said Janna.

"I didn't say that. Janna, if Govert were dead——"  
She turned on him furiously.

"Kill him," she cried, "if you want to; but leave off talking about it." She hesitated a moment. "And kill him fair," she said, walking away.

Her father came round the prow of the boat, on whose other side he had been engaged in close confabulation with Govert. He saw the two lovers, a few steps apart, on the sand in the golden moonlight.

"Come along with me," he cried to the girl. "They're about starting. Govert's got to go home first and say he'll be away all night. He'll pull out to us in his boat later on. He can bring you along with him, Simon."

"I could come with you now. I'm ready."

"No, no. Let the two suitors come together; and the one that liberates the maiden shall wed her. But Govert must have first chance. Ha, ha! you're not fair to Govert. 'Tis like laying a wager when one party knows the result." He went off, laughing, and calling to his daughter to follow him.

## THE TRICK

"I don't believe you," said Simon, between his teeth.  
"You'd never give up your daughter to—a pauper."

And the sea came up with sullen and sleepy roar.

An hour later Govert and Simon stood in the moonlight, by Govert's rowing-boat.

"Are you ready?" questioned Govert.

"I've never not been ready," was the ungracious reply.

"Well, my uncle wanted to go on ahead and have a talk, I suppose, with his daughter. Look here, Simon Parr, we can't both marry Janna."

"Nobody said we could."

"But we can both love her, more's the pity. I promise you one thing, I won't marry her against her will. Not *expressly* against her will. I can't do more."

"Oh, a girl's will! And, then, 'expressly.' Govert Stendal, you're safe enough."

"It's more than you would do for me; I know it. And, besides, there's this great difference between us: if I don't marry my Cousin Janna, I die a bachelor, and you——"

"Will be your heir."

The other started. "It's true," he said, "but nothing was further from my thoughts than that. And you, I was going to say, if you cannot marry Janna, will—marry somebody else, in time."

"'Tis a lie," said Simon coldly. "Let's get into the boat and be gone."

Govert paused, with one foot on the bow. "Shake hands before starting," he said. "I'm sorry I hit out this evening. You provoked me beyond endurance."

"Shake hands with yourself," replied Simon. "Why, pray, should you and I shake hands?"

## THE TRICK

"Because we're to put out to sea together. Every trip on the ocean means a possible mishap. I can't bear to be in a boat with a man that's not my friend."

Simon laughed harshly. "Oh, I'm your friend," he said, "the best friend you ever had, perhaps. Get in."

They glided across the slimy water. The placid moon looked down upon the cadence of their oars.

Far out to sea the fishing-smack, with Roskam and Janna on board, lay silently calling the smaller boat towards her.

The two men were well away from the shore before either spoke. Their skiff was lost in the moonlit dark, on the swelling expanse of the waters.

"Yes," said Simon gloomily, as if following out his own gloomy thoughts. "To-morrow, unless something stops you, you'll be publicly engaged to the girl."

"If I untie her," replied Govert, laughing.

"Don't try to fool me. Untied or not, 'tis to you they'll tie her. Poor thing! Poor honest, happy thing!"

"Simon!" The other's blood boiled. "Best hold your tongue, Simon. So 'll I. Don't forget we're cousins."

"Oh, curse your cousinship!" cried Simon.

Then they both rowed on in silence across the slimy water. The moonlight played about the cadence of their oars.

Presently Simon spoke again, with an effort, as one who is eager to say what he would rather leave unsaid.

"You were talking about dying a bachelor—supposing you mean it."

"I do. 'Tis a stupid sort of thing to speak aloud. But 'tis true."

## THE TRICK

"Well—supposing—then, all the more reason for me to keep you from marrying—*her*."

"To—keep—me—from ? " repeated Govert proudly.

"Anyhow," persisted the other, his voice gaining in assurance, "if I can't keep you from marrying her, I can teach you how to win her fair."

Govert did not answer, pulling steadily.

"Nobody'll find out about that knot unless he's shown. I never knew anybody to do it."

"Well ? "

"I might show you—for a consideration."

"You offer to sell me your sweetheart ? " said Govert, pulling steadily.

"I offer to sell you what'll never be mine. I put the best face I can on a bad business. In another twenty minutes—" he turned towards the vessel looming ahead—"you'll be making a fool of yourself before the lot of us, Govert Stendal. You'll get Janna, in any case : best win her honest. Give me a thousand florins, and I'll show you how to unfasten her hands."

"You speak plainly," said Govert, pulling still. But his eyes were interested ; the other observed his look.

"Here's a bit of rope," continued Simon, producing one from under his jacket. "Shall I show you how it's done ? "

Govert rested on his oars, and fixed a keen gaze on his companion. Simon looked away.

"Is it a bargain ? " said Simon, with a catch in his voice.

"Yes, and no. If I succeed in freeing myself I pay you nothing."

"Of course." Simon laughed with the confidence of achieved success. "If you succeed in that, I'll pay

## THE TRICK

you a thousand florins, though I don't possess a thousand pence."

"I don't want your thousand florins. Here!" Bending forward, Govert stretched out both arms. Simon, with frowning brow and trembling lips, held the noose. His hands shook so violently at first he could hardly steady them. He looked down into the bottom of the boat. "Come," he said in a very low voice. The oars plashed beside them. They lay on the water almost at rest.

"Tie it tight," said Govert cheerfully. "As tight as you tied Janna, mind, or you won't be able to show me properly. Don't you think it's rather a mean thing, Simon, this thing that you're doing just now?"

"No, I don't think it's a mean thing," replied Simon with sullen voice.

"Don't you? Well, opinions differ. Heavens, man! what makes your fingers tremble so?"

"Drink!" answered Simon wildly. His companion looked incredulous, but only questioned

"Did you hurt Janna's wrists as much as you are hurting mine?"

"Janna didn't cry out," retorted Simon, still with sulky accents and sunken eyes. "And, besides, you told me to bind you tight."

"Janna's a good plucked one. Have you done?"

"Yes," answered Simon, sitting back. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Govert, too, shoved back on his seat, and let his fettered hands lie in his lap.

"Well, aren't you going to try?" cried Simon impatiently.

"What's the use of trying? Don't you say it can't be done?"

## THE TRICK

Simon glanced up for a moment ; exultation flashed from his eyes. But he only answered quietly—

"True, it can't be done. You're in my power, Govert."

"Yes," said Govert, with dangerous tranquillity. "A thousand florins is too much."

The man opposite barked at him with suppressed rage. "You'll be sorry you said that," cried Simon. "I'm going to ask for two thousand, or I won't unloose you."

"Two thousand ? When ?" said Govert.

"Will you give me two thousand ?"

"Supposing I say no ?"

"You'll say yes," replied Simon, gently paddling forward. A cloud had come across the moon. It was dark.

"If you unloose me I will give you two thousand."

Simon returned no immediate answer. The water slashed against the keel. "You may well say 'if,' " he replied at length. "Govert Stendal, you're in my power."

"You remarked that before," said Govert coolly.

"Give me one of your two smacks also, and I'll untie you."

Govert looked across in swiftly indignant astonishment, but neither man could now discern the other's face. "What the devil do you mean ?" cried Govert.

"I'll take the oldest and worst of the two—that's the *Mary Louisa*, isn't she ? You see I'm not exacting." All the sneer had come into every word again : there never, in all the village, had been a sneerer like Simon Parr. "You must give me two thousand florins and the *Mary Louisa*, or——"



## THE TRICK

"Or?"

"Or we go up the side together, and Janna and all the rest can see what condition I've reduced you to. Oh, never fear; I'll help you up."

Govert looked down at his powerless hands, and seemed to reflect. Presently he lifted his head with a movement of definite resolve. The clouds had lightened along the moon: great rifts of yellow were piercing the slaty grey. Across the slate of the waters the fishing-smack loomed large, no longer distant, dark against the slaty sky.

"That's once too often," said Govert calmly. "I wouldn't have minded giving you the thousand florins—to make up for losing Janna: I suppose that isn't too much for them as reckons money could make up. I'd have let you unfasten my hands and show me the trick, if so being that was any satisfaction. I'd have let you do all that for losing Janna—for you *are* to lose her. But, dang it, Simon, you're a scoundrel. You want to rob me. I was sorry I struck you. I owed you a reparation. But, dang it, I'm almost glad."

The other, instead of listening quietly, had sprung to his feet. The light boat swayed to and fro.

"Sit down!" cried Govert.

"Oh, I'll sit down," replied Simon scornfully, rocking the boat with extended feet. "You—you—refuse to give me the money, do you?"

"Yes, I refuse."

"Fool, you forget—though I told you once too often for your liking——"

"Twice too often," interrupted Govert.

"——Forget that I have you entirely in my power! You, whose life alone stands between me, a poor devil,

## THE TRICK

and the money that'd gain me the sweetheart who wants to be—not yours, but mine. By G——! it was *you* that have provoked another man once too often! I was wondering all the time on the water—should I do it? undecided. You've decided, not I."

"What?"

Simon vouchsafed no answer. The moonbeams were once again rippling across the water in a broadening band of light. Govert watched his rival sit down in silence, deliberately divest himself of his jacket, draw forth a life-belt from under the seat, and lay it ready for use. The boat swelled and sank in the water, floating near to the ship.

"I'm going to upset us," said Simon hoarsely. "Save yourself if you can. You can't!"

He sprang to his feet again; the boat swung aside with the motion. The life-belt was in his hands; he was endeavouring to adjust it, recklessly flung forward, ready to drag the whole thing down with his weight towards the water. In that moment he saw, with eyes dilated in horror, the man opposite him slip both hands out of their bindings, saw him leap up and upon him, felt the life-belt wrenched out of his grasp, felt the boat surge aloft and turn sideways and upwards and over, felt something strike him on the brow as the great rush of waters closed in around him, sweeping him away, 'neath its weight, into darkness and stillness and unutterable void.

Govert, fighting for life, in the first fear and thought of preservation, struck out from the suck of the boat. The next moment he paused, getting the life-belt under his armpits with an effort, and swam back a few yards, carefully watching. The boat lay bottom up, in the

## THE TRICK

glitter of the moonlight. There was no sign of the missing man. Govert, sick at heart, waited in vain, with one arm against the hull. He never saw the face of his would-be murderer again.

"The life-belt struck him ; it must have stunned him," reflected Govert. With some effort, he set himself to right the boat, and, in the perfect calm of the radiant sea, succeeded. He got into her, dripping wet, alone, and, after protracted hesitation, sadly shaped his course towards the ship.

In another moment he hailed her and went on board.

"Where is Simon ?" asked Janna's voice, as he set his foot on deck. He could not answer. She stood before him, her wrists still encircled by the string.

"Did you forget to bring him ?" she asked tauntingly. "You're late enough."

"I didn't forget to bring him," Govert stammered awkwardly. "We came together."

"Then what's he waiting for down there ?" she cried. She looked over the side ; she could see clearly enough in the moonlight that the skiff was empty. There was no one "waiting down there."

"Janna, I can't help it !" exclaimed Govert madly. He broke loose, hardly knowing what he said. "I can't help it ! It's no fault of mine ! I don't know how it happened. I don't think, Janna, it was any fault of mine."

"Fault of yours ? What has happened ?" Her face was white.

Then he told her hurriedly, confusedly—told her, at first, only that the boat had upset.

"And you had the life-belt on !" she screamed,

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pointing. "You could swim better than he—brute ! Did you hit him in the water ? "

He would have answered, but she heeded nothing, hanging over the ship's side, fiercely weeping, for the truth had dawned upon her that Simon was dead. At last she lifted her face, violently checking the storm, becalmed.

"Murderer ! " she said.

And he tried to tell a little more, to tell how the thing had happened, struggling to leave the dead man unaccused, yet to exculpate himself.

"Murderer ! " was all she said, with her fettered arms against the gunwale.

His cheeks burned ; he grew more explicit. Simon, he said, had upset the boat.

"Why ? " she asked, still looking away in the moonlit darkness. "And *you* had the life-belt ? Murderer ! "

"I am not the murderer," he burst out. "Before Simon upset the boat he had bound my hands like yours. I was willing to pay him for showing me the trick, though I knew it : your father had just taught me ; but while my hands were still bound, as he thought, Simon upset the boat ! "

"I do not understand," she said, still looking away. "I do not believe a word ; there seems no sense in your story. Bound your hands—ah ! " She turned to him, her face aflame. "Ah, I understand ! He wanted to kill you ! "

"He was my heir," said Govert.

"Liar ! He was not thinking of that. You had struck him—you had insulted him—he wanted to kill you ! "

"And so he tied my hands ! " said Govert bitterly.

## THE TRICK

"It was I he was thinking of—I! He wanted me. He wanted *me*. Coward! by your own confession you hit him—in the boat, in the water, at some time, you maimed him. And *you* saved yourself!"

"Listen to me," he cried desperately. "It is not like that—honestly, it isn't. I don't think—oh, don't make it worse for me—I don't think, I'm not sure—no, I *can't* be to blame! By the God above us, that listens, I had no thought of hurting him. A man naturally endeavours to save himself—he'd attempted to murder me—it *was* murder—I—I seized hold of the life-belt—I waited——"

"Cease," she said. "You can spare yourself the trouble. Leave me alone."

"Janna, don't take on so. I can't bear it. He wasn't worthy of you, Janna; he really wasn't. He would readily have sold his claim for a couple of thousand florins——"

"He was very poor," she said, more to herself than to Govert.

"I love you a thousand times more, Janna. Let me make up for him. Janna, you will marry me and make me happy, and be happy yourself some day, in time. Janna!"—his voice grew faint with pleading—"Janna!"

She drew herself up and faced him.

"You told me," she said, "that Simon was a coward."

"I did not say it."

"But you think it?"

"It is true."

"That he was a scoundrel?"

"Janna, what is the use of all this? I only tell you that he is dead, and that I love you!"

"That he sold his claim on my heart for money?"

"So be it."

## THE TRICK

"That he tried to kill you by treachery?"

"Even so."

"Fool! All these things you tell me, and I love him. And you ask me to forget him, and become your wife?"

"Not to-night."

"Ay, to-night. I must wed to-night."

"Let me untie your wrists. If one but knows, it is very simple."

She pushed him back. "Only my husband," she said, "shall untie my wrists to-night."

"But we cannot be married to-night," he pleaded.

Again she checked him. She had drawn towards a heavy weight which lay beside her. She now lifted it in her tight-bound hands.

"Who says not?" she answered.

"Janna, you know as well as I——"

Again she stopped him with an imperious gesture; and, holding the weight aloft. "You have told me much to-night," she said, "and this is my one reply."

She had steadied herself against the gunwale. With the deadly weight grasped tight between her fingers, she flung herself over the side.

## Why He Loved Her

**Y**ES," said Hans Golding to his companion in the "trekschuit," "I love her for her father's sake." He puffed once or twice at his cigar with an air of great decision, and his eyes rested thoughtfully on the passing landscape.

The skipper of the barge made no reply. Hans Golding was his only passenger on this dull September evening, and so the skipper felt aggrieved. Besides, this stranger was a townsman from a distance, and the skipper was wary of what he called "foreigners," especially when these foreigners laid claim to an older acquaintance than his with a corner of the skipper's small world.

The boat crept onward through the falling shadows. Very slowly the water oozed around its ample bosom; very slowly the prim-cut trees slipped past along the straight line of dull canal. The sky sank leaden, like a coverlet of coming sleep. One or two ducks floated silently, too lazy to quack.

"Yes," began Hans Golding, "it was eighteen years ago, as I was telling you. Well, you don't remember me, and no wonder, seeing you wasn't here. My mother, she used to sell brooms along the highways—that was what my mother did—she was what you'd call a tramp.

## WHY HE LOVED HER

Oh, I'm not proud ; I don't mind telling. I've got on in the world, I have. Try a cigar ? "

" Thank ye kindly," said the skipper, " you'll excuse me not smoking it at once." And he shifted the plug of tobacco he was chewing while he stowed away the precious present in a pocket of his brown woollen jersey.

" She'd been ill for a long time before she died," continued the stranger, " but die she did, all of a sudden, one night in Baas Bultman's cowshed ; died as a dog might die, on just such a still dull evening as this ; and she wasn't a bad mother either. No, she was a good mother, say I, as mothers go nowadays."

He looked up at the skipper for confirmation, and the skipper nodded grave assent.

" They'd have thrown me on the parish but for Baas Bultman. I should never have come to nothing then. No, I should never have come to nothing. Did you ever know any one thrown on the parish as came to any good ? "

The skipper took so long delving into all his experiences and memories of so vast a subject that his passenger lost patience.

" Well, I never did. Nor did any one I ever heard on," said Golding in the tone a man assumes when he starts on his favourite theory. " Baas Bultman comes in to me where I sat crying by the body—I was only seven, you see, and hungry to boot—and ' My lad,' says he, ' you shall stay with me. But you'll have to work hard,' he says."

" Didn't he say d——d hard ? " asked the skipper earnestly.

" Maybe he did and maybe he didn't ; but when I tells the story I always tells it without."



## WHY HE LOVED HER

"Well," said the skipper, "it don't sound natural for a man to talk about hard work without damning it. Howsoever, Ben Bultman was always pious, and I can't say as I've ever heard him swear much."

"Pious he is," affirmed Golding, "for he saved me from the workhouse, and if that ain't piety, show me what is!" He held his cigar aloft interrogatively at the skipper. But the skipper was not prepared to show what piety was.

"I lived with him," continued Hans triumphantly, "and he brought me up—I won't say as it wasn't hard—but he looked after me. And when I was fourteen, and he saw that I wasn't the sort for the farm work, he prenticed me to a carpenter at Overstad, and——"

"Said he was glad to get rid of you," suddenly interrupted the skipper.

"Did he say that?" inquired Hans anxiously.

"So I've always heard," replied the skipper, a little ashamed as he fingered the cigar against his breast.

"Well, I dare say he was right. Howsoever, I've made my way. I've the smartest little shop in my part of the country. I settled over yonder, in the north, you know, at a small place called Dorkum—and look at me now!" He spread himself out in his dark check suit, and the dim evening light caught the glint of his watch-chain.

"You've been luckier than Bultman has," said the skipper, reflectively watching two pigs by the water-side.

The carpenter gave vent to an exclamation of regret. "When they told me," he said, "at our place the other day—'twas at market—that Baas Bultman was bankrupt, I said, 'Tis a lie! 'Tis a lie,' I said: I was that

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sure. And when Joris Piets, as is my own neighbour and church clerk, told me as the thing was true, for he'd heard it from his sister's daughters that lives in these parts, why, you might have knocked me down with a broken reed, you might. I knew that Joris Piets wouldn't willingly tell a lie, and I said, 'I'll find out for myself,' I said, and as soon as I could I took the railway this blessed morning and come straight away!"

"How long did you do over it?" asked the skipper, naturally interested in distances.

"And now you tell me it's true," continued the carpenter, unheeding.

"Ay, it's true enough: he's going to be sold up next week."

"To think of it!" cried Hans, studying the handle of his tiny umbrella.

"They do say that he speculated," remarked the skipper, his eyes on more pigs farther down.

"Sold up!" repeated Hans. "And what'll become of his daughter?"

"Dina's to go into service: that's sure and certain," replied the skipper, glad in his own dull way to be the purveyor of such important news.

Hans Golding sat chewing his cigar in silence. At last he said—"Who'd 'a' thought it?" which remark struck him as so exceedingly apposite that he made it over again.

"It's what you never think that always happens," said the philosophic skipper.

The carpenter slapped down his right hand on his knee. "I've always loved that child for her father's sake," he said; "she was a quiet little feeble thing, not much to look at, that timid and startled, afraid of a

## WHY HE LOVED HER

dead mouse. She never took much notice of me, going about in her own half-frightened way. Do you know, I used to think she looked down on me all the same—a charity boy, as you might say.” He stared at the skipper, but the skipper saw no reason to commit himself.

“Well, it wouldn’t ‘a’ been unnatural,” reasoned Hans. “I’ve often thought it out. She’d pass by me that proud, as you might say, and not give me a look. Some people say it was shyness, but it isn’t natural her being shy with a charity boy like me.” He nodded his head. “She was a little lady, she was,” he said.

“She’ll have to climb down,” remarked the skipper, who did not approve of these sentiments.

“I ask you,” continued Hans, rising with outstretched hands, “is that sort of frightened little nervous haughty creature the sort that you’d send into service? No!”

“P’raps not,” said the skipper, with a grin.

“P’raps not! I tell you, no! Can you see her in a big loud kitchen with a lot o’ servants? No! Can you see her in a crowded drawing-room a-answering the bell? No! Can you see her listening in the hall to the talk of a young footman as is pinching her round the waist? No!”

“You needn’t shout so,” replied the skipper, “I don’t want to see her in none o’ them places.”

The carpenter struck his umbrella on the deck and sat down again, looking wise.

“She ain’t a beauty,” continued the skipper. “Least-ways, not what we call a beauty in these parts. She’s too thin and pale, and what people in the town call ‘delicate,’ with them big eyes of hers. She won’t find a husband here.”

## WHY HE LOVED HER

The carpenter nodded his head vigorously. "That's what I said to myself," he remarked.

"A husband!" repeated the skipper. "No, God bless your soul! And she with a bankrupt father!"

"I'm glad you've give me all the facts," said the carpenter. "You never hear 'em right at a distance—at least, not so as to make sure. And it's five years since I came near this place."

"Then why did you come now?" queried the skipper.

"I thought I'd like to look up the old man in his trouble."

"My! you are a rum 'un," said the skipper. "Well, Ben Bultman may be glad of the only good action as I can hear he did in his life. Oh, he's a pious man, I know, but that *hard*. I never heard as he gave away a halfpenny to a beggar. But there! Some men are good-natured all their lives and never meet with nought but ingratitude," said the skipper ruefully. "Well, gratitude ain't much good, that's a comfort." And the skipper pushed his fur cap aside to scratch his head. "No," said the skipper, "what Ben Bultman wants, and won't get, is *cash*!"

"I can't give him cash," replied the carpenter, glumly. "It's all true what you say. I've thought it all out afore I come." He got up and stretched his legs. "There's the house! My! how the pear trees have grown. Let me out. I'm going up straight."

"Going up straight, are you?" echoed the skipper. "My! you are a rum 'un. Well, good luck to you. Good-night!"

Hans Golding strolled thoughtfully along the bit of path that leads up to the long white farmhouse. First

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he whistled a popular street song to hide his embarrassment ; presently he dropped into a very slow low Psalm tune, just enough to keep up his courage. He stood still at a little distance from the house, and his murmured whistle sounded like a sad and solemn dirge. There it lay before him, the small group of long familiar buildings, nestling in a clump of beech and poplar—the beeches were losing colour, the poplars trembled slightly in the heavy air. And over the shiny walls of homestead and outhouses the lengthening shadows fell. He shivered, for he suddenly thought that the wind was cold. Thus, as it now lay before him, he had never beheld the old place during all the years of his town life. He had often seen it, especially of winter nights, as it shone in the prosperous splendour of a sunny summer day.

Ben Bultman came out of the barn, and turned to look at the stranger.

"Why, it's you !" he said. Not another word of greeting.

"Yes, it's me, Baas," answered Hans, clinging hard to his umbrella.

"Well, and what have you come for ? I can't say we want you here."

To this apostrophe Hans in vain sought a fit reply.

"You've got better friends in the village ; go on to them."

"No, I haven't !" said Hans. He said it with such a burst that he coughed to hide his confusion.

"Well, I can't stand dawdling here. They haven't left me a herd to help me. I've got to look after the cows myself."

"I'll help you," cried Hans, pulling off his Sunday coat.

of a hindrance than a help."

"Well, I'll do my best," said Golding, following his old master into the shed.

"It don't matter much anyhow," remarked Bultman, busy with the fodder; "the whole thing's to be sold up next week."

"'Tis hard lines," replied Hans, up to his elbows in hay.

"No, it ain't hard lines!" cried the farmer, "for isn't it all my fault? Why don't you say it's all my fault?"

"How do I know whose fault it is?" said Hans Golding.

"They all say it's mine, if they know or not," replied Bultman.

"Well, I shouldn't have said it even if I'd known. It isn't a pleasing thing to say to any man, Baas, and it wouldn't be my place to say it, anyhow."

Ben Bultman stopped for a moment, his arms full of hay, and stared at his former farm-boy.

"Well, you are a rum 'un!" he said; "but it was not my fault—though that don't make it no easier. I've been hanging on by the teeth for years."

They worked on in silence till everything was ready for the night.

"Well," said Hans as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, "it comes natural like to be doing this sort of thing again."

"No, it never came natural to you," replied the old man, but not ungraciously. "You was town-bred, and you never took to farming. You're no better and no

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worse at it—that I can see—than ten years ago, when you left it. A good thing for you, Hans, that you went to the town: you've made your way. Others have got to begin theirs that are too old at the start to go far."

"I wish I could help you," said Hans timidly.

"Nobody asked you," came the gruff reply.

"Baas, may I say something? I haven't got any money, as you know, or I'd gladly give it you."

"You haven't got any to give, so you may say it," responded Bultman.

"But everything that I am I owe to you," continued Golding, standing with his coat still off in the gathering twilight of the shed.

"Well?" said Bultman.

"It was in this very shed that my mother died," spake the other, dropping his voice, "at just such a twilight hour as this. It was here you found me and took me to live with you. And if I can honestly earn my bread this day, I owe it to you, Baas."

"Get away," said Bultman.

"Baas, it is true that Dina is goin' out to service?"

"It's no business of yours," said Bultman.

"P'raps not. But, Baas, she ain't fit to go."

"D—— you!" said Bultman.

Hans Golding waited. "I," he stuttered at last. "I—look here, Baas: I've always loved you for what you did for me, and she's your daughter. I should never have thought of such a thing, of course, but, if you was thinking of an honest home for her—as they say you're off by yourself to work for your bread in foreign parts—you know what I've got, I could support her decent—and it might be better than service for such as she."

Baas Bultman stood facing his visitor in silence.

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"I—I beg your pardon," gasped the other, very red and miserable, "I know that it's a great presumption on my part. But I couldn't bear to think of your fretting your heart out with your daughter in service here."

"My what?" cried Bultman. "You idiot! Nobody has ever talked to me for twenty years of my heart!" Then he added, in a matter-of-fact tone, "I never knew you wanted to marry my daughter."

"I never did," replied Hans.

"Humph! Well, let us talk business. You think that you owe me a debt, and so you want to pay it. Have I understood you aright?"

"Yes, I owe you a debt," answered Hans.

"Well, make your mind easy; you don't."

"But you——"

"Hist! You are a fool, Hans. Do you think a man like me does a kind action for nothing? You owe me nothing. Go home and be content. Marry the girl you told us about when you were here five years ago."

"I don't want to marry her," said Hans.

"Did you love Dina ten years ago—five years ago?"

"No," replied Hans, "I shouldn't have presumed."

"Tut, tut! love presumes. I know that it did in my day. And do you think I'd let you marry my daughter out o' gratitude to me? I don't want gratitude, you fool; I've no right to it, I tell you. Listen well!"

"What is it?" said Hans.

"When I took you it wasn't for any desire of mine. I swore that I wouldn't touch you, a workhouse brat! If it had been left to *me* you'd not have spent a night in my house. You'd be a charity boy to-day."



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"Is that true?" stammered Hans.

"True as Gospel truth."

"A charity boy to-day," gasped Hans. "I should have come to nothing. A charity boy to-day." Then his face cleared. "But what made you take me?" he said.

"A—a relative of mine," answered Bultman promptly.

"She came to me and offered to pay for you. 'He's a charity child,' she says; 'God has sent him,' she says. She called me a wicked name; I didn't care for that—every one has always called me a hard 'un. So I am. But she offered to pay for you: that was different, and I took you. Pay for you? I made you work."

"Pay for me?" repeated Hans stupidly. "Yes, you made me work." But again a bright thought struck him: "It was you that 'prenticed me to the carpenter at Overstad?" he cried.

"Not I. She paid every penny she had to do it. I should have kept you at the farm. 'He can't do the work,' says my relation. 'He must,' says I. 'I'll pay for him to learn a trade,' says she. 'More fool you,' says I. And she did."

Hans Gelding heaved an immense sigh and stood silent.

"So, you see, you owe me nothing. I got plenty of work out of you while it lasted, my lad."

"But—this relation?" exclaimed Hans.

"Do you want to marry her?" responded the other, with a laugh.

"No; but I would like to thank her," answered Hans.

"You can't," replied Bultman shortly. "Go home in peace, you zany, and marry the girl you want to

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marry. Marry a girl for her own sake, not her father's, and leave me and my daughter in peace."

"Father, aren't you coming?" said a voice behind him. Dina stood in the door with a lamp. The lamp shone on her delicate features and light-brown eyes. Truly she would never have done for a farmer's wife, thought Golding. They all went across to the farmhouse, and soon sat down to the evening meal. It was a silent repast. Dina spoke once or twice of old friends, of old times, of the city; but the cloud of a great sadness hung over them all.

Towards the end the farmer went out of the kitchen to fetch a bottle of brandy, and Hans and Dina remained together. She began to speak at once of the great trouble, of her grief for her father, soon to fare out into the wide world alone.

"And you?" said Hans.

"I don't mind," she answered quickly.

"Don't mind? Oh, Dina! Don't mind going out to service? You're not fit for it."

She looked at him, trying to say something, but her eyes filled with tears; she broke down and fled.

"Baas," said Hans, when the old man came back with his bottle, "I've been thinking it all over during supper, and I find I was mistaken—I'm sorry, very sorry, you didn't—I mean, I'm sorry I don't know who did—and—but, it needn't make any difference about Dina—if you'd let me ask her—if you don't think I'm presuming—I could support her easy—I—I wish you'd let me ask her—just ask her—to marry me anyhow."

"You owe me nothing," grumbled Bultman; "I never had any money to spare."

"Please, I should like to marry her all the same."

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"Then you love her, do you?"

"Yes, I love her."

"And why, pray?"

"I don't care a d——," answered Hans, who had never been known to swear.

At that moment Dina came in with two glasses.

"Well," said old Bultman grimly, "don't you want to thank the person who insisted on my keeping you, and who paid for your apprenticeship out of her own money in the bank?"

Dina dropped both glasses.

"Oh, father, have you told him?"

"Yes," replied the father, "and he insists on marrying you out of gratitude."

"Gratitude be hanged!" said Hans. And he got up and ran round the table to snatch her hand. "I want to marry you because I love you. And I love you—because I love you," he said.

## In Extremis

"GOOD-BYE, doctor!"

"Good-bye, child!"

"And thank you kindly."

He did not answer, but went down the garden-path, between the hollyhocks and sunflowers, an old man, bent with gazing deep into other people's sorrows, yet the tears swam in his kindly eyes as he shambled on through the sunset summer shadows.

Roosje turned by the dairy door; she went back among the blue and white tiles, the sweet smell of milk all around her. She was comely with the freshness of eighteen years' up-growing in Dutch pastures; her arms and neck stood out, perhaps a shade too delicately veined, against the tight-fitting black of her peasant costume and against her gold-pinned muslin cap.

"Dawdling!" said her stepmother's angry voice.

Roosje started. "I was thinking," she answered confusedly.

"Of the cows?"

"No, mother, not of the cows."

"Of sweethearts, then?"

Roosje hesitated. "No, not exactly of sweethearts," she answered slowly.

"Psha! what should a farmer's daughter think of but one of them two? You ought to be ashamed

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of yourself, Roosje, and that's what I've been wanting to say to you. If it was an honest young man of your own sort as came courting you, well, so much the better, says I: there's mouths enough, anyway, to feed in this family. But no decent girl'd allow a young Squire to say he was sweet on her."

"He's never said a word like it!" cried the girl, her cheeks flaming, "never said a word all the world couldn't hear. We was friends ever since we was little children. We've always played——"

"I know what I know," replied the big farm dame sententiously, and moved towards the door; but her step-daughter intercepted her.

"What do you know?" exclaimed Roosje: "you're new to these parts, and you don't understand our ways. It's different up in the North from what we do here. We've always played, all our lives, with the Squire's children."

"Have you? Stop now, then," replied the step-mother viciously. She pushed through the door, but pausing to aim straight her final shot: "Madame's maid from the Château told me they all know he says that he's sweet on you," she added; "but he don't intend to marry you, he says."

Roosje remained standing in the golden shadows, among the shiny tiles; and the sweet smell of the milk was all around her.

The Squire's son came across the dreamy fields, in a haze of deep-blue evening, the lazy cattle lifted their heads to see him pass. He stopped by the dairy door: a little dog leapt about him and licked his hand.

"I join my ship to-morrow," he said.

"I know," answered Roosje.

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"I have been here just a month," he continued.  
"It has been a very happy time."

She did not reply.

"Seeing my mother again, and my father, and all the others. What a lot of us there seem to be."

"Not more than here," she said.

"And where many pigs are, the wash gets thin," he said, quoting a common proverb.

"Gentlefolks always have enough to eat," replied Roosje.

"Have they indeed? Much you know about it! You know nothing about it. You know nothing about gentlefolks, Roosje."

"No indeed," she said humbly.

"I mean, about their necessities. Now, look at me, a poor sailor man with half a dozen brothers and sisters. Obligated to sail alway to the Indies for a livelihood," he laughed, "in the service of Her Majesty the Queen."

"How long will you be away?" she asked quickly.

"Two years, at the very least."

"The poor men's wives!" she said thoughtfully.

"What a time it is!"

"Oh, I dare say the wives don't mind. No, I won't say that! 'Tis a hard lot, that of a sailor's wife. I should never dare to offer it to any woman."

She looked at him curiously. "Never intend to marry at all?" she said.

"Oh, some day, I suppose, when my seafaring days are over, I shall settle down somewhere with a bald brow, a middle-aged spouse, and money-bags."

She shook her head. "That doesn't sound nice," she said.

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"Well, what can I do? For the next ten or fifteen years I can't be anything but a sailor. And so I can't marry if I would, and I wouldn't if I could." He spoke with inward heat, as if arguing more against himself than to her.

She rattled the milkpans, moving them, looking away.

"See here: don't let us spoil these last moments talking about a dismal future. You see, I have come to say good-bye. I shall often think of the Farmhouse, Roosje; think of the times when we all played together in the orchard and the haylofts. What a jolly round dozen we were! And now one of us is dead."

"Yes, one of us is dead," she assented; for he had lost a brother a year ago from typhoid. She repeated the words once or twice among her milkpans: "Only one of us is dead."

"Only? Surely that is enough!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"There might be more," she answered, and spilt a great splash on the floor.

"Lord, what'll your stepmother say! You a milkmaid!"

"I wasn't attending. I don't think I ever did it before. Now, Jonker Dirk, I think you had better go."

"Go? What nonsense! I've only just come."

"Mother doesn't like it," said Roosje, blushing.

"Like what? Me? Well, she won't be troubled by my presence for the next two years. Your father was a fool to marry that woman, Roosje."

"Oh, Jonker, hush!"

"Sailors speak their mind. And besides, you know

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it, without my saying anything. She makes you unhappy, Roosje: I hate to think of that while I'm away." With his foot he pushed the splash of milk towards the little farm dog, who began lapping with great wags of his tail.

"She means well," said Roosje. "Good-bye, Jonker. God bless you. Good-bye."

"No, in thunder! What has the woman been saying to you, Roosje? Come, we have never had any secrets from each other, never, since I told you all my scrapes, and you—I don't think you ever got into any scrapes, not into real bad ones, at least, like me. Have you got into a scrape now?" He looked at her good-naturedly, smiling. Then suddenly, with an angry change of face and voice—"Don't listen to her! Don't believe her. Whatever she says, I've no doubt it's a lie!"

Roosje was silent for full ten seconds. Then she answered, still looking away—"She don't think I ought to have talked with you: that's all."

The great veins rose up on his neck. "Now answer me honestly: have I ever said a word—one word—to make me deserve that?"

"No, oh, no! Not one word. But people will talk."

"Talk! Who talks? Why, I am going away. I have had a very happy month here. Who talks?"

"They—they—oh, it doesn't matter one bit."

"It matters. I will know." His voice rang low, so strong she could not have disobeyed it.

"It's only stupid servants' talk," she said, the words coming as if they were being dragged forth slowly through a loophole. "Your mother's maid has told my mother lies."



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He started so violently, she could not but see it.  
"Tell me exactly what she said."

"I couldn't, Jonker."

"You must. At once. In an hour I shall be gone, perhaps for good."

"I couldn't." She hid her face in her hands. "She said you had said things you never could have said, and everybody had heard them."

"Well, it is true," he said simply. "See what parents we have, you and I! I told my mother, for she asked me, and my mother told her maid! Well, what does it matter? I am going away."

She took her hands from her burning face. "Tell it me," she whispered. The shadows fell so heavily, he could barely see her outline against the pewter cans.

"No."

"Tell it me," Her voice grew softer still.

"Good-bye, good-bye."

"Tell it me! Tell it me!" The words barely sank on her breath.

"God in heaven! I love you, but I cannot marry you, so I oughtn't to have spoken at all."

"Yes, yes, yes. You love me. Of course you cannot marry me."

"I never should have spoken, but for my mother's misdoing! What can I do? I don't want you to believe lies about me. That would be too bad!"

"You love me. Of course you can't marry me. I don't want you to marry me. But, just for a little, you have loved me all the same."

"How can I marry? I cannot marry any one."

"In time, when you come back bald-headed and

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with medals—medals, please!—you will marry a woman in your own rank of life.”

“Confound my rank of life! When I come back, Roosje, I shall visit you in your own farm-kitchen, and wish some brave fellow joy.”

She smiled, but he could not see that. He bent forward.

“Well, then, must it really be good-bye?”

“Wait a moment! One moment longer! You love me. You really love me? Say it again.”

“Oh, what is the use of saying it? It cuts me like a knife.”

“Dear Jonker, it needn’t do that. Listen just one moment. One moment longer. Mother will be coming to look for me. I also have got something to say, Jonker. I—I also have got something to say.”

“That you don’t care for me? Better leave it unsaid.”

“Not that—oh, not that!”

“That you are going to marry some one else? So much the better. I know something about that. My mother told me. I should never—no, not even now—have spoken, else.”

“It is a lie!” She cried out the words.

Alarmed, he hushed her.

“It is a lie! What I want to say—what I **MUST** say at once—is not that, oh, not that! Oh, so different! Jonker, when you come back again I shan’t be here. Listen!—don’t interrupt me. Oh, Jonker, do you think I should have let you say as much as you did—should have led you on to say it—yes, yes, a woman can stop a man or lead him on—if, if—unless——”

“What?”

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"Jonker, you know I'm sometimes ill. Didn't you ever think it might be mother's illness? All her family die of it. I asked doctor on purpose this evening. I asked him to come and see me on purpose. I wanted to ask him before you came to say good-bye."

"You ill!" he cried. "Nonsense! you—all pink and white?"

She shook her head in the darkness.

"I *made* him tell me," she said. "I told him besides that I knew already, and that was true, though, of course, it does sound different. I can't last beyond the winter, he says. It doesn't really much matter. Tell me you love me, Jonker Dirk."

"It isn't true. It isn't true."

"Yes, it is true. Nobody 'll care, when you're away. And see here, Jonker: it has brought me the great big happiness of all my life—nothing more, anyhow, could come after that."

"It isn't true. It isn't true."

"Say again that you love me before mother comes. Say it again."

He threw his arms around her, he drew her towards him. "I love you; I love you; I love you!" He rained kisses on her upturned face.

"Say it again. Oh, say it again. You see, it is the last time, Jonker!"

"I love you, I love you, I have never loved any one before, dear: I shall never love any one again!"

"Ah, yes, you will! You will love the woman you marry. Promise me, for my sake, you will marry a woman whom you love. Money-bags or no money-bags, Jonker, you will marry a woman you love?"

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He kissed her and drew her towards him and kissed her again and again.

"This is my wedding day, you see," she whispered, 'but it isn't yours, Jonker—not yours. You will marry later on—and be happy—very happy—some day."

The pitch-dark night was about them in the dairy. A bell tolled in the distance. The little dog scrambled up against his mistress, yelping, jealous, distressed.

"Oh, I love you, I love you!" she murmured. Then "good-bye," she said, and was gone.

## A Bit of To-day

**"H**E will recover," said the half a dozen doctors assembled in solemn conclave around his bed. So he died.

The wisest of them, putting on his admirable chastened expression, went to tell the widow. The dead man, as all will remember, was close upon eighty, the widow not twenty-five.

"Dear me!" she said nervously, squeezing the two bull-pups that had sat up in her lap to scowl at the doctor. "How very dreadful! How very dreadful and sad! Black doesn't suit me at all!" This last sentence she spoke to her maid when the doctor had gone away.

She was Mrs. Peter van Dobben, one of the wealthiest women in New York City. Three years ago she had been the struggling daughter of a Baptist minister in that same place. Frocks were her struggle, and gloves, and especially boots. Nine brothers and sisters grew up underneath her, whom she hated because they seemed to be pushing her out of what home she had. She was like a sweet flaxen doll, all pink and fluffy. Old Peter van Dobben, the millionaire rubber merchant, fetched her away one fine morning out of her disdainful drudgery, and planted her in a big bay window, with a

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fine view of other bay windows peopled by lesser millionaires.

Now, three short years later, he was dead. The childless widow, with much bejewelled hand, settled her pretty back hair and talked to her maid of fashions in mourning. Occasionally she wondered about the will. A will is an important consideration to the childless young widow of the richest old corpse in New York.

The next thing to happen was that she knew about the will. A great many things, of course, happened before—the arrival of the “casket” among others—but all seemed to have faded away into forgetfulness in the face of the enormous fact of the will. It had been made just six months ago, and it left every penny old Peter possessed to “my nearest relation in Holland.”

Mrs. van Dobben put her black-bordered pocket-handkerchief into her pocket at once. She had stopped crying, even in public, the day before the funeral. The papers said her self-command was wonderful.

“Who, pray, is this nearest relation?” she demanded.

The solicitor could not tell.

“Find out!” said the widow. Her tone, he thought, was distinctly unfitting, considering her altered circumstances. He began to talk of difficulties, possible delays. She stopped him.

“Telegraph to Consuls,” she said. “What are Consuls for?”

“Well, yes,” replied the lawyer, with meditative noddings. “I can book that, of course, as legitimate expenditure.”

She looked at him; suddenly she realized that she was poor. She rose with a not ungraceful movement, and went to her jewel-box that stood upon a side

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table. She unlocked it, extracted a string of pearls, and almost flung them in the lawyer's face.

"My dear madam! My dear madam!" he protested, bobbing back from the table.

"There can be no difficulty about the matter," she said, with dignity. "Mr. van Dobben came of a very important Dutch family. He hardly ever spoke of his relations, but he always gave me to understand that they were highly connected. He ran away from school in his youth as a cabin-boy. There is no particular hurry, now I come to think of it. Have the goodness, Mr. Parsimmons, to make the necessary inquiries."

The lawyer, thus dismissed, went away and did a lot of cabling. Not with immediate success. When he called at "the van Dobben mansion" next morning, he was informed that the widow had sailed at daybreak for Europe. She had left a little letter for the lawyer. He found it to contain the torn half of a thousand-dollar note, and the curt information that the other half would be his if he stopped his inquiries for a fortnight.

Meanwhile the lady lay groaning and gurgling in her state room. She never could endure the sea, at its smoothest; a ripple made her cry out for death. But death came not, though she cried for him very often. Whereby he showed that he knew women, and, of course, his experience of their weaknesses is large. She arrived safely in Liverpool, and she pointed out to the waiter that very evening, gently but firmly, that really the steak he had brought her was a trifle overdone.

She scolded, and even bullied, the maid she had brought with her in much more explicit tones. If no man be a hero to his valet, no woman is an angel to her

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maid. The maid almost forgave her. "Something wrong about the will," said the maid.

In the solitude of boat cabin and hotel bedroom, Gladys van Dobben—her father, the Baptist minister, had named her Hannah—would draw a scrap of paper from an innermost recess of her silver-gilt dressing-case, and sit staring at it for ten minutes at a stretch. Immediately after the reading of the will she had gone straight to her dead husband's desk and looked over all she could find of his private belongings. In a drawer, put away by itself, she had found the letter she held in her hand.

It was a Dutch letter; she could not make out a sentence of it. But it began, "Dierbare broeder," and that, she felt, must stand for "Dear brother"; it was signed "Jacobus"—i.e. Jacob—and it was directed from Slapsloot, a place, as revealed by the postage stamp, in Holland. The date of the letter was barely a fortnight previous to that of the will. Now, old Peter, never loquacious, had rarely referred to his pre-American days. Once he had spoken, with energy, of an only brother who, wiser than he, had resisted the temptation to marry. The occasion was a recent one—the night, as she remembered too distinctly, preceding the making of the will. For the date of this unknown will had come as a revelation.

On June 8 he had made it. On the 7th they had had that stupid tiff about Charlie. It was absurd of old Peter to be jealous of Charlie. She had always been so careful about Charlie. But these rich old curmudgeons were all like that. He had laughed away the quarrel, with the words, "Let us say no more about it"; and the next day he, who had sworn a hundred times that she was his only relative and should inherit all his property,



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had gone and made a will leaving everything to this unmarried, unknown brother. She had understood the brother to be long since dead. She had always behaved decently to Peter. Poor Charlie !

She had started immediately for Europe, without any definite purpose, perhaps, but with several indefinite ones, in search of "Jacobus." Who was Jacobus ? She pictured him to herself as a sort of younger Peter, but with probably more of that old-world refinement which American money-making is apt to rub off. She had once met a couple of Dutch gentlemen in society. They spoke English with ease. She had thought them singularly delightful—"Knickerbocker," you know—Washington Irving.

All that she cared about in life, except Charlie, now belonged to "Jacobus." She thought it out constantly during the voyage : her boudoir in the New York house, with the genuine French tapestry (wonderful imitation), belonged to Jacobus ; the two iron-grey ponies at "The Grange" belonged to Jacobus ; the cottage at Newport was his. The idea became an obsession. She counted up a dozen lesser items—her pretty round lips cursed Jacobus.

"Well, I guess we're *there* !" said the maid, with a swoop ; and commenced unlocking a trunk in the bedroom at the *Euston Hotel*.

Her mistress sat up. "Don't unpack. We go on this evening, by the night boat, to Holland."

"What place, please ?" cried the maid.

"Slapsloot," said the widow van Dobben.

"And where's that ?" cried the maid.

"I haven't the faintest idea ; but we shall be there to-morrow."

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It is superfluous to add that they were.

Not, however, without some slight complications, consequent upon their being compelled to quit paths along which the English language still possesses a more or less uncertain value.

On arriving at "The Hook," Mrs. van Dobben had inquired for the city of Slapsloot. It had been rather disconcerting to discover that the place in any form, big or little, was unknown at the Hook. A time-table proved inefficacious. She had gone on to Amsterdam—and everything was most delightfully quaint and unlike anything—and the hotel porter found Slapsloot for her ultimately in the "Postal Guide."

"I am greatly worried, and very badly treated, and it's all very sad and a great shame," said Gladys, lying back on a couch and surveying the canals, "but, dear me! I wonder what's going to happen. I feel very curious and interested. It's all so exciting, especially Jacobus."

In the biggest room of the biggest hotel of the very small town nearest Slapsloot she prosecuted her investigations as to the best methods of "getting there." She had taken a guide with her. It was a great satisfaction to reflect that here, at least, she was miles away, literally and figuratively, from the inquisitive New York lawyer. She had nearly a week left—quite enough for her projects, whatever these might turn out to be.

"Inquire," she said with bold grandiloquence, "about the mansion of Mynheer Jacobus van Dobben!"

Mine host shook his head; but he was a heavy man, caring for nothing outside his immediate ken.

"We shall find out when we get there"; and she got into what they call "the conveyance." She thought

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it most cunning. A sort of mediaeval fly. But as soon as it began to tilt across the cobbles she clung on to the seat, with a face that jerked and worked like—well, like molten lead, for instance, when suddenly cooled. She had brought an English-speaking guide with her from Amsterdam, but she left him behind at the hotel. For she thought it would be a nuisance at her brother-in-law's house; he would talk about her hunting for Slapsloot, her inquiries and uncertainties. That was not at all her idea. She intended to inform Jacobus that she had talked so constantly of him with Peter, it seemed to her as if she had known and appreciated him all her life. Yes, she would say "appreciated." All at once, as she hung there, quivering, opposite her frightened and disgusted servant, she realized distinctly what she had come for and what she intended to do.

She intended to marry Jacobus, seeing that she knew him to be unmarried. She had not understood this clearly before, but she felt sure of it now. There were difficulties in the way, but she was an American, a beauty—she smiled to herself—had she not married that inveterate old bachelor, Peter, as soon as she wanted to? The idea of legal disablement, such as exists in England, of course lay entirely outside her sphere of thought. She was going to marry Jacobus; she simply must. In the shaking wagonette she reflected on her ponies, the tapestry in the New York boudoir, the cottage at Newport—she simply *must*. And why not? She had married Peter. She pictured to herself this younger brother, a sort of Washington Irving Peter, as has been suggested before.

She drove on for hours through bleakest country; getting nervous, she probed the driver, but he only shook

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his head. When houses appeared in sight, she vainly questioned : Slapsloot ? The answer took the form of another mile or two across the moor.

At last there came a turning to the longest road on record. A white mansion stood among gardens ; a small village lay some distance beyond. The driver lifted his whip and pointed.

" Aha ! " said Mrs. van Dobben. " Drive up to the house, if you please ! "

When he understood, the lethargic, lubberly lad obeyed her.

It was a handsome place, beautifully kept ; Gladys nodded approval.

" Just like Peter ! " she said, in passing a big notice-board : " Trespassers beware ! " An old gentleman was walking in front of the house with a little brown dog. The dog yelped. An old lady sat on a bright green seat, knitting. The widow at once noticed the old gentleman's resemblance to Peter. The old lady disconcerted her with violent heart-bumpings. For she, the old lady, seemed so palpably the old gentleman's wife.

The vehicle, with its unwonted contents, stopped in a final rattle. For the old gentleman had posted himself in front of it ; the little dog barked very loud.

The beautiful American had recovered her self-possession. " Mynheer van Dobben ? " she said.

" By no means, madam," came the prompt Dutch reply.

The stolid boy took no notice.

" I—I beg your pardon," faltered Gladys.

The old gentleman answered testily in English that his name was Pock.

" Perhaps," continued the fair widow, annoyed by his

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manner, "it would not be too much to ask you to direct the driver to the house of Mynheer Jacobus van Dobben at Slapsloot?"

"I never heard the name; there's no such person," replied the old gentleman.

"Indeed, there doesn't seem to be any other house of importance in sight," said Gladys, desperately, to the maid.

The dog never ceased barking; the surly old gentleman had walked away to the house; the old lady sat watching.

"Drive on to the village," said Gladys in disgust. The village proved a very small one; a sudden shower, long expected, broke across it with a violence that sent the very hens skeltering for cover; the wagonette dripped. In the deserted street a rather nice-looking dwelling revived Gladys' spirits; it turned out to be the parsonage; the minister and his wife were both out.

"I am certain Jacobus lives at Slapsloot," said Gladys, half crying. "I must see him; I must speak to him. I cannot make it out at all."

"Please let us go back before we're murdered," said the maid.

"I won't," replied the mistress, with acerbity. "Do you think I've come across from New York without reason? My whole future depends on my speaking with my dead husband's brother *at once*."

"You might inquire," began the maid, "in a day or two——"

"If I could employ others—if I could wait a day or two," interrupted Gladys, "I should have been utterly crazy to have come at all." And, indeed, already her whole simple plan of campaign had taken shape. Of

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course, she intended to present herself as the owner of Peter's many millions. Jacobus must have engaged himself to marry her—must have married her—before he learnt the truth.

She had already got to hate most thoroughly the slow, suspicious Dutch peasantry before the driver had succeeded, amid the rainy wretchedness and desolation, in unearthing an individual who shook favourable response to her weary iteration of inquiry.

"Jaap Dobbe? Why didn't you say Jaap Dobbe?" remonstrated the individual. Gladys' face suddenly beamed. "He knows?" she exclaimed excitedly. "Eh, driver? Mynheer van Dobben, eh?" Animated confabulation followed between the two Dutchmen—then came another drive through brushwood and over moorland. At last a wide white building appeared amid loneliness. Before this the driver drew up with a bump.

"What now?" demanded Peter's widow.

"Jaap Dobbe," said the driver.

"Absurd," replied the widow.

The place was a small farmhouse. The green door opened slowly; a ponderous figure solemnly framed itself in the doorway.

"Jaap Dobbe?" cried the driver.

The figure nodded assent.

A moment of terrible hesitation—then Mrs. van Dobben flung herself out of the wagonette, and hurried through the pouring wet into the cottage.

The fat man, amazed beyond power of protest, had stood aside to let her pass. She sank down on a straw-bottomed chair—in her ultra-fashionable mourning—and covered, for a moment, her face with one hand.

Then she straightened herself, and looked at the man.

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He was enormous—purple-faced, quite common—a peasant, and in peasant dress.

Some absurd mistake, of course—not a bit like thin, rarefied Peter.

She hesitated, uncertain how best to end this ridiculous episode.

Then, feeling she must say something, she remarked—  
“ Slapsloot ? ”

The fat man gave a voluble affirmative reply.

“ Van Dobben ? ” she continued desperately.

“ Jaap Dobbe,” said the man, and a lot more.

Again she hesitated. She realized that one thing must be done at once, and she did it. Closing her eyes, with sickening tension, she drew a paper from under her corsage and laid it on the table.

When she opened her eyes the man was grinning painfully and nodding.

She knew that this was Jacobus.

Awful as that moment was she did not lose her presence of mind. In a flash of lightning that seemed to burn across her brain she saw all the things over yonder in America, all the things that made life life : she walked away to the window ; she looked out and came back again. “ Peter dead,” she said, and swept her hand down the crape of her skirt.

“ *Ja—ja*,” replied Peter’s brother.

They stood facing each other for some minutes, inevitably inarticulate. Outside, the dreary wagonette waited with the maid, in the rain. Gladys went and closed the door. At last, the sheer impossibility of all preliminaries driving her to desperation—

“ Much money,” she said.

He stared at her.

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"Money mine," she continued, and in spite of herself she blushed crimson.

When she lifted her eyes to his face she saw he had not understood !

A few drops of spite gathered in her lovely blue eyes ; then she knitted her brows and pondered.

Presently she drew a silver florin from her purse and laid it on the table ; he watched her. She put her finger on the coin and then rapidly waved her arms in a circle. He understood—he understood—much money !

She pointed her finger to her breast.

He took off his cap. Thank Heaven ! he had understood.

He stood bowing before her. Yes, certainly he had understood.

She turned to the window and sat down deliberately, with her back to him, feeling that, in the first place, she must resolutely collect her thoughts.

Her husband had, of course, lied to her from the first about his relations. She could feel annoyed but not angry with him for that ; she would have done it herself.

The most natural thing now looked to leave the house immediately and go back again. Where ? To what ? Penniless. To New York. The wealthy widow van Dobben. Back to father and mother. One idea had dominated her, as she now wondered, from the moment of the reading of Peter's will.

She was pretty, but how many people were pretty ! And she would be a great deal less pretty than the rich Mrs. van Dobben had been. She remembered how old Peter's offer had come to her as a windfall, incredible, too good to be true. Her own mother had exclaimed, Is it possible ? Her father had said it was the Lord's doing ;



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she herself had trembled daily lest old Peter should die before they had been to the church. Such things did not happen twice in a woman's lifetime. No second millionaire—the ponies—the boudoir with the hangings!

She had taken Peter. She stole a cautious side-glance at Jacobus. He was the owner of Peter's millions, and that, as she well knew, in our day is all-sufficient.

She would start him in London; New York would follow. It is easy to make up your mind when no choice is left you. In a few days he would hear about his inheritance, and then, certainly, he wouldn't marry *her*.

At the thought of this she gave a gasp. Rising from her chair, she went and took the letter he had written, and held it under his nose. Her little white jewelled fingers moved under the two opening words.

"Dierbare broeder." She goggled up at him with her innocent blue eyes.

"Dierbare broeder"? She tried to pronounce the words. He roared with laughter; but when he saw the sentimental tears gathering in the lovely eyes he stopped abruptly, and, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself, stroked with one red paw the little white hand.

She looked out into the pouring rain. Could she stay here that night? With signs she explained her dilemma. He caught at her meaning. Fortunately, the small farmhouse, like so many others, had two tiny rooms, unlet, for summer lodgers. He threw open a door, and exhibited them, scrupulously neat.

"At least he is clean," she thought. "How clean all these people are! Peter was right about that." She went to the entrance and called "Bridget!" The maid arrived, sour-faced. Jacobus, stumbling awkwardly,

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fetches the bags and wraps. Gladys wrote a note to the guide, bidding him come next morning to the village inn at Slapsloot ("Is there one, I wonder?" she reflected), and sent it off by the driver. As the wagonette rumbled away into the rain-mist across the heath, she felt like the leader of men when the smoke hid his burning ships.

Braced by this consciousness of a great emergency, she began to play her little part. She opened her big dressing-bag and extracted its gilt-stoppered blandishments. Soft perfumes, soft lawns, and laces; an atmosphere of refinement and feminine attraction spread about her. But this sort of thing, as she well understood, is repellent to a rustic, unless, by being mixed with simplicity, it becomes irresistible. In the midst of her inevitable luxury, therefore, she was most natural and charming. She thoroughly enjoyed the humble fare he set before her; she helped scornful Bridget to lay the table. Constant misunderstandings gave rise to unceasing merriment. They "supped," with beer and steel forks, amid much gesticulation and roars of laughter. Suddenly Gladys sobered. A tear lay on her cheek. "Poor Peter!" she said. And she showed Jacobus Peter's portrait in her locket. It took a long time and much motion for Jacobus to explain that Peter had been better-looking in his youth.

"More like Jacobus?" Well, yes, more like Jacobus. Conversation, however, languished after supper. The success of the evening was certainly the widow's fearful faces over a drop of Jacobus' best Dutch gin. But, after that, all three were glad to get to bed. As Jacobus lighted the candle, he asked his new sister-in-law's name—"Naam? Naam?"

When he had understood it—not before it was written

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down—he shook his head over the bit of paper. For “Gladys” in Dutch means “slippery ice,” and there are proverbs about not venturing near it.

Happily unconscious of this unlucky coincidence, the pretty widow retired to rest in her cupboard of a room. The poverty of her surroundings strengthened and encouraged her. After a period of preliminary wakefulness she slept soundly, and awoke to the chirruping of birds behind a sunlit window-blind.

She lay revolving her immediate future. She must marry Jacobus without delay—any moment failure overwhelming might befall her—he would learn some sort of English, and have the best London tailor; in her three years of millionaire society she had met dozens of brutes no better than he. After all, she lived in the twentieth century, which knows but one class distinction—gold.

She was aroused from these not unpleasant reflections by the muffled music of gigglings and scufflings aloud. Little feminine squeaks of excitement mingled with lower guffaws. She leapt from her bed and peered behind the blind.

What she saw was Bridget romping round the cow with Jacobus. Bridget, it appeared—in sudden reminiscence of her Irish home—was attempting to milk that quadruped, and Jacobus was doing his best to prevent her.

When Gladys got back into bed again, she pulled the sheet over her ears, and furiously bit a hole in it.

The next moment she rang her hand-bell, peal upon peal, for her maid. She was as sharp as she dared to be with this menial, for American domestics are not European. “How common the common people are!” she said to herself. She sent a message to Jacobus

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lady, a great lady : he could not believe that his brother, in dying, would have turned him out of his humble house and home. Tortured by uncertainty, he had gone to fetch the scholar. He now asked humbly what the message was.

Gladys saw her chance at once. " I have no message," she said.

His face fell ; the great, good-natured red face turned almost pale.

" Of course he will have to refund the money," she added. She even said " principal and interest," for in business matters a woman rarely knows where to stop ; but the schoolboy's English did not stretch the length of " principal."

" *Ja—ja*," said Jacobus, and his fat body shook. She eyed him contemptuously, this ridiculous Dutch peasant, with his conscience and his comic misfortune, one of the wealthiest magnates, had he but known it, of New York. He might know it—to-morrow. She resolved not to go too far.

She sat down by the kitchen table, and her mourning fell about her in very becoming folds. She was delightful to look at, and she knew it. She ought to have been enjoying a period of dignified seclusion at " The Grange." Her heart cried out in hate of Peter.

" Tell Mr. Jacobus van Dobben," she said, " that his brother died enormously wealthy."

" *Ja—ja*," said Jacobus.

" His wish was that all his money should pass to Mr. Jacobus——"

" Eh ? " said the latter.

" On condition of his marrying me."

" I—I—I would rather not," said Jacobus.

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The boy checked a grin, and translated a more courteous rejection of the offer.

"Is the man mad?" cried the enraged widow. But a little later she condescended to more rational parley.

"And ruin?" she said, staring at Jacobus. "Ruin?"

"Heaven help me!" he replied; but a lot of little beads stood out on his forehead.

She rose; she sailed up the rough kitchen once or twice; then she stopped in front of the man.

"You refuse to marry me? Refuse?"

"I—I—would rather not," said Jacobus.

She looked long at his distracted yet dogged countenance. Then she sank down by the table and burst into tears.

"It is I who am ruined," she sobbed, her face in her hands, "for Peter has left Jacobus all his money, and trusted his honour to marry me."

Jacobus needed no translation of the tears, which most greatly distressed him. The words, when he understood them, seemed to trouble him even more.

"My—my, what?" he stammered.

"Honour," repeated the youth, in huge enjoyment of the scene.

Jacobus waited a long time—and the widow wept a great deal—before he said huskily, "I'll do it."

The widow stopped crying, sat up, and bade the boy go for his father. Her idea of European marriage laws was built up on Mr. Jingle's special licence, Wilkie Collins' "Man and Wife," and a recent Scotch scandal in New York society. In Dakota you could be married in five minutes; Europe was slow, aristocratic; you would probably need twelve.

But it took an hour and a half to fetch the parson.

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Meanwhile Jacobus withdrew to the yard, with a promise to return which she did not apprehend. She took a novel from her bag and tried to read it.

"Madam," said the minister, standing in the middle of the kitchen. He was a long-necked individual, with a look skywards, and every word that he uttered was important. "Madam!"—he looked from Gladys to Jacobus and back again—"I understand you wish to marry this worthy person. Well, what have I to do with that?"

"You speak very good English," replied Gladys, smiling more sweetly than she need have done had the remark been truer.

The minister bowed stately approval and waited for more.

The widow van Dobben laid down her yellow-back novel.

"Marry us," she said.

"It shall be very pleasant to do so," replied the minister, "if spared."

"At once," said the widow van Dobben.

"It cannot!" exclaimed the minister; "the banns——" He had looked out this word in his son's dictionary before starting.

"A special licence!" cried Gladys.

"Will want a fourteen night."

"A fortnight! Why not say three months?"

"And now I am coming to consider him, madam, when did your husband retire?"

"Some weeks ago," answered Gladys, blushing crimson.

"You cannot in our country, then, remarry for nearly a year."

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The widow van Dobben put her black-bordered bit of cambric in front of her face, and burst into very real tears.

"Nay! nay!" remonstrated Jacobus, who, of course, had not understood a word. The minister rapidly enlightened him.

Meanwhile Gladys sobbed on, disconsolate, crushed. Good-bye to the ponies and the tapestry.

Her distressful beauty much exercised the minister. He began to speak in tenderest tones.

"I am thinking," he said, "a friend is coming. He will help you. The vehicle is arrived from the town, and your guide; and it has brought a gentleman, a compatriot, inquiring. I see them at the inn. I am thinking I hear rumblings."

Jacobus was thinking so too, for he went to the door. A moment later he moved his portly body aside, letting pass Mr. Parsimmons, the American lawyer.

"Mrs. Peter van Dobben, I am glad to have found you," said the lawyer.

"But you've lost your thousand dollars," replied the widow with animus.

"I am not so certain of that." The lawyer smiled.

"It wants three days to your fortnight——"

"Even though it wanted four! I came after you as quickly as I could, for on the day of your departure I received a sealed envelope from a friend of your late husband, inscribed to be sent to Mr. Parsimmons twenty-four hours after the reading of the will."

"Well? well?" stuttered the widow, tearing holes in her handkerchief.

"It contained a second will, madam, made a couple of hours after the first. In it he left you, with the excep-

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tion of a considerable legacy to his brother"—Mr. Parisimmons made a provoking pause—"all his property."

"The villain!" shrieked Gladys.

"A strange comment," said the lawyer coolly. "You shall pay me, mistress," he added to himself, "for this journey." Aloud, he continued—"For reasons I am unable to appreciate, your lamented husband wished to create, during a brief period, an erroneous impression in your mind."

"The mean, spiteful villain!" wept Gladys.

"You are left entirely free to marry whom you like." The lawyer stole a look at Jacobus. "There is only one exception. A Mr. Charles——"

"Hold your tongue!" exclaimed Gladys, rising. She was the richest widow of New York; she could afford to bully a solicitor. She walked with stately step to the door.

"And what is the end of it all?" questioned the puzzled Jacobus.

"Your brother has left all his money to his wife," replied the minister, "but it seems there is a legacy for you."

Jacobus gave a "shoof" of triumph.

"Then I shall marry Brigitta," he said.



## A Comedy of Crime

**I**N the placid summer sunset the village smithy rested. Surely there is nothing more suggestive of repose from labour than a village smithy with a fire that is turning grey.

Under that great beech the brawny smith sat thoughtful. His big arms, in the sleeves they seldom wore ere nightful, hung idle across his bigger knees. The hard toil of the day—of the week—was over. On the fields, and the neighbouring cottages, and the silent road, lay a drowse of gathering darkness. It was all very peaceful and tender, with an occasional murmur or tinkle; night was approaching, the happy summer night, in which even slow men's senses are stirred by the thought of the fairies' awakening; the kine lowed from the distance, full of the day's calm memories, in buttercup content.

The smith sat, his black brows frowning heavily, thinking of nothing at all.

From the homestead over the way, a shiny white building, uncomfortably spruce, there issued a long thin figure, in sombre clothing, which figure, majestically crossing a hundred yards of field and garden-plot, advanced toward the sleeping smithy. The smith sat well back, his round eyes a-goggle, and snorted.

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"Neighbour Blufkin, I wish you a good-evening," said the lanky old person in the black tail-coat.

"Good-evening, Neighbour Boll," grumped the smith.

The first speaker blinked his eyes. "To-morrow is the blessed Sabbath," he said.

"Damn the blessed Sabbath!" was the unexpected reply.

Elder Boll uplifted his lean hands to the listening skies. An awful silence spread down from them upon the little group—the smithy, the beech, the two men.

"I beg its pardon," presently began the smith, his cheerful face ashamed, "I'm sure I beg the blessed Sabbath's humble pardon. I didn't mean to say as much as that. It's blasphemy. But you make me do it, Neighbour Boll."

"I forgive you with all my heart," said Elder Boll. "But, I hope, neighbour, that you now have duly considered my warning and exhortation of the night—let me see—the night before last." He cautiously let himself down on the seat beside his burly victim, a proceeding of considerable difficulty, as the victim did not budge.

"The night before last and every other night," spitefully retorted the smith. "It's just jaw—jaw—jaw. Well, you may jaw till Doomsday. I can't run away."

"Doomsday, indeed!" echoed the elder, and dreadful thunder rolled with relish through his tones. "Doom! Doom! Doom!"

"Now it's you that's swearing," said the smith, reproachfully, and wedged the tobacco down into his pipe.

"I shan't get tired! Don't fear," continued Boll,

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wagging his cadaverous face to and fro. "No, I'll warn you, neighbour ; I'll reprove you ! I'll exhort you—there's no escaping me, Blufkin. 'Sarah,' says I to my wife every night, 'I'll never rest till I've brought that man, like a penitent, into the sacred edifice again.' "

"I'd have gone back a month ago, if it hadn't been for you," snorted the smith.

"Ah, *there* speaks the voice of the scorner. But you needn't try to escape *me*, neighbour. No peace shall I know—nor you—till I've saved John Blufkin from his reprobate, hardened, impenitent condition, saved him like a—like a——"

"Don't you burn your fingers," interposed the smith, threateningly.

"Brand from the burning ! " triumphantly exclaimed the elder, catching at the simile. He sat up, or rather "clung up," as well as he could, on his end of the seat, and eyed, with calm certitude, the big mass beside him.

"Now, look ye here ! " bellowed the smith. "See what happens. Last Kermesse-time—and damn all Kermesses, says I—that's not blasphemy, but religion—last Kermesse-time—there never was a little misfortune befell in a village or Kermesse was to blame for it—["Amen ! " said the elder]—last Kermesse-time I finds a young fool a-trying to kiss my girl Suzie against her will. In the booth it was, where the five-legged calf was—*my girl* ! " He started up with a roar, and shook his mighty fist in the frightened elder's face.

The latter, shrinking back precipitately, lost his uncertain balance off the seat's edge, and subsided upon a heap of rusty barrel-hoops that lay handy by the smith's door. He was up again in a moment, with a

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squeak. As he hurriedly and anxiously began rubbing himself, the rude blacksmith's laughter rang loud and long.

"Why the devil can't you sit when you sit?" said the smith. "What's the use of seating yourself like that beside as good a bench as ever bore a weight like mine on to nothing at all?"

"On to barrel-hoops," corrected the old man, savagely. "Untidy heaps of rubbish lying about a respectable man's house, and on Saturday evening, too!"

"I'm not a respectable man," retorted the smith, with vigour, "and nobody knows it better'n you. When I hears my girl cry out I goes for that young fellow, and I gives him what for. I don't say I didn't give him more than what I intended——"

"You half killed him," interrupted the elder, viciously. "You'd had too much, and he'd had too much, and you forgot that vengeance is Mine——"

"Yours?" cried the indignant smith. "You think you can put your finger——"

"Blufkin, you are a heathen! I *pity* you!" piped the shrill old man, with immeasurable scorn. "Surely you know that vengeance wasn't yours, but——"

"Yes, that's what the magistrate said," continued Blufkin, sullenly. "'Don't you know,' says he, 'that the police are there to repress misconduct?' Police! Repress! Damn the police! I wouldn't apologize, not on a red-hot gridiron, for swearing at *them*!"

"I am an old man," said Elder Boll, with admirable precaution, "and I tell you, you are a profane brawler. And what did you get for your pains? Eight days' imprisonment. For the rest of your life you stand marked a——"

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

"Don't say the word again!" burst in the enraged Blufkin.

"Well, I'll only think it," retorted the elder. "All the village thinks it, and always will."

The other ground his teeth, and the veins stood out black upon his forehead.

"And therefore I say unto you repent," continued the elder, sweetly gazing at the pale-blue sky. "You just come back to church; we'll all see that means you're sorry. Henk, that you half killed, 'll see you're sorry. He won't mind. You just come. We'll see you're sorry. That 'll be repentance, atonement, remorse, a begging of everybody's pardons for the public offence; a humbling of yourself in the day of your abasement." He rose up, in all his rusty lankiness, and projected his piercing finger at Blufkin's chest.

"You go home," gurgled Blufkin.

The elder carefully surveyed his companion's countenance, and then suddenly walked off without saying good-night.

It was almost dark now. In the softly shaded night, all balm and tranquil happiness, the blacksmith's pretty daughter that the Kermesse row had been about, sweet, simple Suzie, the apple of her father's eye, came down the quiet country road on her return from the weekly mission meeting. Beside her walked Peter Boll, the elder's son, that was learning for lay evangelist, a sort of electro-plated parson.

"How sweet the air is!" said Peter.

"It is," said Suzie.

"But not as sweet as you," suggested Peter.

"How silly!" answered Suzie.

"It's the truth!" cried the lovesick swain.

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

"Gospel truth?" demanded Suzie, thereby catching the future theologian on the horns of a dilemma.

"Well, it's true enough for you and me," he made cautious reply. "Don't you like to hear me say it, Suzie?" he continued.

"Of course I like it in a way," frankly answered the girl. "Leastwise I suppose I shall when you've spoken to father."

"I'll speak to your father as soon as I can. You don't think, Suzie, there's any chance to-morrow?"

But Suzie shook her head.

"If father 'd been a-going to church to-morrow, he'd have got himself shaved at the barber's to-night."

The young man sighed. "Still, there's no knowing for certain," he ventured. "If the spirit was to move him—"

Suzie shook her head all the harder. "The spirit couldn't move him unshaved," she said.

"Father is that set on it!" groaned Peter. "He hasn't a good word for the smith. 'Jailbird,' he calls him. 'Jailbird.' I get sick of the word"—Suzie stamped one pretty foot—"don't you get angry, Suzie: he is an unrighteous unbeliever. Father's only thinking of his soul."

"You leave my father's soul alone," said Suzie.

"I'm not meddling with it, but, you see, I ain't an elder. When I've been ordained a preacher—I shall have to meddle with it then!" He lifted a complacent smile to the lofty vault of heaven. A solitary star returned the smile.

"My own father-in-law!" he added. "I shall have to convert him then."

"You'll find it pretty hard work," replied Suzie, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders.

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"Pooh! I tell you I'm bound to convert him. A pretty name I should get as a preacher, if I couldn't convert my own father-in-law."

"Well, you try," exclaimed Suzie, in a pet. "He's not your father-in-law yet, and I'm not at all sure he ever will be. Father's worth two of you, Peter. He licked Henk for making me cry out. You'll never lick Henk!"

"He's stronger 'n me," replied Peter; "I must think of my good-conduct test. If anybody was to show impediment——"

"Oh, there's nothing wrong about your good-conduct test, I'll be bound. Poor father! You wouldn't have licked Henk."

"Licking's sinful: the Bible says we should turn the other cheek."

"Yes, that's what I ought to have done to Henk," remarked Suzie, complacently. "It was silly of me to cry out like that, and at Kermesse-time too. He meant no harm, but he'd drunk too much."

"Suzan, for shame!" The aspirant preacher fell back.

"Henk isn't half a bad fellow! I like him," cried Suzie, wilfully. They stood still by the fence round the smith's garden, where the side-road curves into the laurel bushes.

"Say another word, and I *will* thrash him!" cried the infatuated lover.

"Do," said a hearty voice, and a figure, stepping forth from the shade of the bushes, brushed the candidate aside as a broom might sweep away a cobweb. "You'll have to, if you stop another minute, for I'm going to kiss Suzie again."

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"Don't. Go away," said Suzie. She almost let the two sentences run into one.

"There's two things I want to tell you, Suzie, before I do," continued Henk. "First, I'm sorry I was a brute to frighten you. Secondly, your father didn't hurt me much. All the talk about death's door was malicious slander, set about by some people—they best know why." He shot the last sentence at Peter.

"Don't shout so, for Heaven's sake!" gasped Suzie.

But her warning came too late. A big head appeared over the tall fence, and the smith's loud bass demanded:

"Suzie, who's with you there? Come in."

"Father's standing on that horrid rain-barrel," whispered Suzie. "It's all right, father. Only Peter Boll, walking home."

"You come in at once!" The smith stumbled off his rain-barrel.

"Now you mark this," declared Blufkin, as soon as his rosy-faced daughter made her innocent entry into the kitchen. "I'll have no flirtation with Peter Boll."

"Oh!" said Suzie. "Mother!"

The cheeriest, healthiest, handsomest old cluck in the village immediately responded to the cry of her chick.

"Now, don't you talk foolishness, Blufkin," interposed the fat vrouw, laughing, because she always laughed when she spoke, unless there were cause for tears.

"I suppose you don't want the prettiest girl in the country to marry at all?"

"I don't say that."

"Well, it looks as if you meant it. One young fellow comes courting her, and you give him a black eye; another——"

"He's a wild 'un," interrupted the smith.



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"Granted that he be a bit wild before marriage. You was wild after. And Peter Boll. Too good, I suppose?"

"Yes," thundered the smith. "You've hit it, old lady. Peter's too good. No son-in-law of mine shall turn up the whites of his eyes at his wife's father. I've enough of the old man's preaching; I won't stand the son's." He banged his fist on the table at "won't," and Suzie screamed. "'Jailbird!' says the old hypocrite. 'Jailbird!' pipes the young one. I'm a jailbird, am I?" He threw out his chest and faced the two women.

"Well, you are, after a way," replied the wife, thinking to soften him.

"I'm a jailbird, am I?" he repeated quietly, turning to his daughter.

"Oh, father, I don't know."

"Yes, you do. Am I a jailbird?"

"Of course you are, in a way," stammered Suzie, beginning to cry.

"Of course I am. Now, mark my words. Your mother says I make difficulties about your marrying whom you like or she likes! No, I don't, none but one. The man that you marry must have been in prison, Suzie. That's all that I ask." He turned on his heel.

"What on earth does the creature mean?" exclaimed the mother.

Blufkin paused by the door. "What he says," was his stern reply. "You want no better son-in-law than your husband, mistress. There's dozens of honest young fellows have got into scrapes about poaching or fighting or larking, a hundred times better than the sneaks that have kept out. And Suzie shall have a

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jailbird for a husband, or she shan't bring the man into this house!" He waited in the doorway as if half irresolute. "I swear it by all that's sacred," he said, and disappeared into the smithy.

All the colour had gone from the mother's ruddy cheeks. "Oh, if only he hadn't said them last words!" she sobbed, and sank down on a chair.

"He don't mean 'em," exclaimed Suzie, scared; "he often says 'em."

"Never, child. Mean 'em or not, he'll stick to them now. When father says 'by all that's solemn', he don't count that for much. But, Suzie, when I married the good man, he swore to me 'by all that's sacred' he'd never get drunk again except at Kermesse-time. He'd broke his oath before"—the poor woman's tones went shaky—"but 'I'll swear to you by all that's sacred,' he says with a frightened face, and, Suzie, he's kept to it; he wouldn't dare not."

Suzie lifted up her voice and wailed.

"During all these twenty years he's never got drunk, except at Kermesse, regular. And when he came back from—jail last month, he walks into this kitchen here with a face as white as yon tablecloth, and 'I'll stick to my two drams a day,' he says, 'Kermesse or not,' he says; 'I swear it by all that's sacred.' I've never heard him say it but just that twice and now. Oh, Suzie, you'll never be able to marry Peter now! Are you really sure you want to?"

"Yes," said Suzie, rebelliously.

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," groaned the mother. "And it's very sudden, Suzie. You never used to think much of him, the canting—h'm. It was always Henk I thought you liked."

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"Never!" exclaimed Suzie, with quite superfluous vehemence, turning very red.

Her mother stole a glance at her.

"There'd be some chance for Henk," said the vrouw, with a little ripple of humour, "though I never heard of his poaching. Well, a girl must have her own way about a husband. I had mine. Though if you was to ask me, Suzie, I *think* you're acting like the squire's daughter I was a lady's-maid to, who married the wrong man, and that's why they called it 'pick.'"

"Father's drove away Henk," murmured Suzie.

"Well, child, you needn't have screamed so loud. And at Kermesse-time, too, and your father so hasty. Your father's like a lord about his womanfolk; I will say that. There, call him in to supper. Hear him knocking bits of cold iron about!"

The meal was a gloomy one, but a few hours later Suzie's rather sulky slumbers were disturbed by the well-known sound of her mother's laugh. She opened her eyes to the glare of a candle and the shaking of a loose white mass. The ponderous vrouw sank into a chair by the bedside.

"What is it, mother?" asked Suzie, not over graciously.

"Suzie—hi! hi! hi!—now tell me, Suzie, you're quite sure you want to marry Parson Peter Boll?"

"I don't know. Let me sleep," answered the poor girl, closing her eyes.

"Well, you shall have your choice. A girl seldom changes her mind when it's set on the wrong 'un. If you want Peter you shall have him, child. I had to come and tell you that. I've got an idea."

She rose heavily, still shaking her sides, and moved

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towards the door. "It come to me as I was undoing my back hair," she said.

"What idea?" cried Susie, suddenly bolt upright in the bed.

"I'll tell you all about it in the morning. I must work it out."

"Well, I can afford to wait."

"That's a bad sign for Peter," replied the vrouw, closing the door behind her.

Next morning being the Sabbath, everybody went to church, except Blufkin. He stood, uncomfortable, behind his window, and watched the people go.

And he stood defiant before his door and saw them all come back. His wife and daughter walked slowly beside Peter. Before they separated, the vrouw's idea had taken more definite shape.

"Who wills the end must will the means." The smith's wife quoted this bit of well-born wisdom several times to Peter before she could get him to see how true it is. Her plan, in half a dozen words, was this: The smith, whose honest self-respect had been unduly humiliated, must be humoured in this crotchet of his about having a son-in-law no better than himself. To put the matter plainly, Peter must be helped to commit a crime. The vrouw herself felt that Peter, unabashed, would be a trial beyond endurance.

"But I can't sin," pleaded Peter.

"Nor you needn't," replied the ready vrouw. "You can take the money—won't it be yours when you marry Suzan?—besides, you'll return the box to me an hour later."

"I can't do it," said Peter.

"And I'll show you what's inside."

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Peter pricked up his ears. "I can't," he repeated, with the decision of weakness. "If I was to be found out——"

"Where'd your good-conduct test be?" interjected Suzie, slyly.

"Well, then, do the other thing—what I said first. It's the better," cried the vrouw, her face all ripples of laughter. "Go for Henk."

"I cuc—cuc—can't," gasped the wretched youth.

"Or you might try a bit of honest poaching."

"Lord! I might get shot!" cried Peter. "That's worse than a fight."

"Well, that's what I thought," said the vrouw, decidedly. "I thought you'd mind priggish something least. I promise you I'll make things right enough. I'll explain to the smith, and he'll be glad to get quit of his foolish oath. The box with the money that Suzie's great-aunt left her is in the wardrobe in my bedroom. I'll leave the door unlocked. The good man sleeps in the parlour all Sunday evening. You'll put the ladder to the window at the back—hi! hi! You'll bring me the box at once, and before I tell the smith a word I'll make him swear by all that's sacred that Suzie shall marry you, if she wants to, as soon as you've done something which could get you into prison!" The jolly vrouw laughed on, as Peter thought, beyond rational cause for laughter.

"But he'll call me a thief," expostulated Peter.

"Only between ourselves; he'd never shame his daughter's husband in public. And the pleasure of calling Elder Boll's son a thief—he'd take you for that alone."

"But not if he thinks I *am* a thief!"

"Does your father think my man a 'jailbird'?"

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

She turned on him triumphantly. "Do you want to marry Suzie or don't you? Well, nothing'll prove your love to him like you doing all this for her sake. And he'll have his gibe ready to fling at you when you start preaching righteousness—as you will."

"There's no sin, as I can see," said Peter, reflectively; "but there's a risk."

"Yes, the box is heavy," continued the smith's wife. "There's a good deal in the box; you'll it know by its weight. You're sure you want to marry Suzie?" She stole an ugly look at him from out her cheerful eyes.

"You needn't ask him again, please, mother," said Suzie, with uplifted nose.

Peter gazed at the pretty tilted feature, but, alas! his thoughts were of the box. Suzie was known to have inherited money; the wildest rumours circulated as to the amount. Had ever mercenary lover a better opportunity before marriage of finding out exactly what he loved?

"You'll show me what's inside?" he said.

"I keep my promises," answered the vrouw, shortly. "Yes."

"And you'll lock the parlour door?"

"Don't I tell you he's asleep all Sunday evening? A-sitting looking up the road with his eyes shut!"

"And you'll stop with him all the time and keep him from coming after me?"

"He won't come after you," replied the smith's wife, with much meaning.

"I'll do it," said Peter. "It's a capital way."

"It is," declared Suzie's mother. But she again laughed inordinately, as she watched Peter cross to his home. "Suzie," she said, "you're a fool, girl, but

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

I pity you. It's your father's doing. And what can we do? Henk——"

"Oh, mother, please don't talk of Henk! It is father's doing. I never want to hear his name again."

"I was only thinking that if Henk were to do something that got him into prison, it wouldn't be stealing a money-box." She repeated these words with many furtive glances and head-shakings at her daughter. She slipped out in the afternoon, and went, as she said, to see her sister; but when she came back she laughed so much that the smith was annoyed at her untimely gaiety. He felt very cross himself, weighed down by his silly oath of the night before. He had a great opinion of his wife's judgment and a poor one of his own, but he knew that even she could not release him from the bonds of "all that's sacred." A terrible power indeed.

"Don't be a silly featherhead!" he said; so she knew he was longing for her guidance.

When the still Sabbath even had fallen, Elder Boll came round to the smith's door for a little friendly chat. The vrouw met him with her finger on her lips. "Hush, he's asleep," she said.

"He is," replied the elder; "in trespasses and sin. Stand aside, vrouw; 'tis my mission to wake him!" And he banged a loud bang with his stick on the parlour door.

The vrouw shrugged her shoulders, and grinned an expressive grin. "Oh, of course," she said, "if it's your mission to wake him!" And she flung wide the door.

"Giggle not, woman!" said the elder, sternly, as he took his seat beside the smith and began to expound the beauty of repentance in the manifestly fallen, the value of public humiliation after patent shame

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

Meanwhile Peter, having assured himself, by repeated peeping, of the smith's sleepy presence at the parlour window, having even waited until he could distinctly hear a continuous snore, crept round to the unlocked gate at the back of the garden, found the ladder, as advised, in the outhouse, and softly stole up through the grateful darkness to the open window on the second floor. His heart went pit-a-pat, but whether with fear or expectation he could hardly have told himself. His hands trembled as he seized the box in the cupboard, and felt its enormous weight. He knew that this trembling of the hands was a tribute of nature to gratitude awakened and to hope that soared beyond hope !

He hurried with his pleasing burden to the window and rapidly felt along the sill. The ladder was gone.

" O Lord ! " he said, and he was such a hypocrite that really one cannot be sure whether the words were not a prayer.

He looked hastily to right and left ; there was no escape. But at that very moment he needs must fancy that he heard a sound on the stairs.

He looked down the wall, trying to measure its height in the darkness. It was not so very high, and the water-butt stood close beside it. The ladder must have fallen among the bushes. There was nothing for it but to slip down and get a footing on the water-butt.

He placed the box on the window-sill, and let himself down by both hands. Clinging tight, he took the handle of the box between his heavy jaws, and felt, dangling with both legs, for the top of the water-butt

Alas ! at that moment, in the very gasp of success, a violent pain shot across his body and changed the gasp to a howl. He twisted under it, with a wrench, that



## A COMEDY OF CRIME

caught his flapping coat-tail in an iron hook against the wall, and the money-box dropped clanging to the ground. For a terrible moment he hung there, shrieking with agony, as blow after blow descended, lustily dealt, half-way down his long wriggling frame. Several people had come running out of the house with a lamp. His screams, objurgations, and curses rose on the calm air, alternately threatening and pitiable—in a minute it was all over, and Peter lay spluttering in the water-butt. They pulled him out quickly, and propped him up against the wall.

Then he saw all their faces at once, in a circle, Suzie's and her mother's, and the smith's Henk's—and his father's!

"Peter!" screamed the horrified elder.

That was almost the worst of all. The dishevelled and dripping lover saw, as his rapid glances travelled round the company, amazement and amusement written on every brow. Only the stolid, handsome yeoman, whose hand held a goodly switch, fresh cut from the bushes, wore an air of calm content.

"Peter!" cried the elder, wringing his hands. "Oh, what a fall was there!"

"There was indeed!" said the smith; "into the water-butt."

But Peter's eyes now rested on the money-box. It had struck against a rail and burst open. A great brick had fallen out, leaving it empty. "Why, there's nought but a lump of brick in it!" he said.

"What! a thief!" exclaimed Blufkin, finding speech.

"A thief!" repeated Henk. "And I thought he came after Suzie."

The vrouw began to laugh and laugh.

"Get away!" she cried, winking to Henk. "What

## A COMEDY OF CRIME

do you mean, you young rogue, by prowling about this house when nobody knows you're near ? ”

“ Well,” replied Henk, and hung his head before the smith's uncertain gaze, “ you see, I—*am* after Suzie.” He straightened himself. “ Yes, dang it all,” he said, “ and in spite of all, I'm after Suzie.”

“ Where's Suzie's money ? ” suddenly shouted the smith, and ran toward the prostrate figure with menace in face and gesture. Peter doubled up and shrieked.

“ Keep cool, smith ! ” called his consort. “ Suzie's money is safe enough. It'll never be Peter Boll's ! ”

Peter Boll lifted his angry eyes to her face, and a look of intelligence stole across them. “ I don't want the money,” he said, “ but I'll have my revenge of that howling brute.”

“ Who did you say was ‘ howling ’ ? ” asked Henk.

“ Assault and battery,” responded Peter.

“ O Lord, yes, assault and battery ! ” chimed in Elder Ball. “ Peter, my boy, never you mind. I know you meant no harm. Imprisoned for assault and battery ! ”

“ Like father,” said Suzie amazed at her boldness.

“ Shall I make it worth your while ? ” asked Henk, switching the air as he spoke.

The smith interposed with outstretched hand.

“ It's Peter must go to jail for stealing my bricks,” he said, cheerfully. “ Shake hands, Henk, and let by-gones be bygones. I love you for licking the skulking cad.”

“ We'll have the law on him, never you fear ! ” cried the elder.

“ You're sure you will ? ” interposed Vrouw Blufkin, suddenly pushing to the front.

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"Sure!"

"Certain?"

"What does the woman mean? I never swore in my life, but I'll swear to Henk's going to prison for assault and battery."

"Then in that case he'll be a jailbird like me——" began the smith, as a grin broke slowly across his awkward features.

"The pair of you, indeed, in a Christian parish."

"And your clerical son," concluded the smith.

"So Suzie can take her choice," suggested Suzie's mother, as the elder fell back, disconcerted.

"Tush, tush!" said the smith, "we'll all go to church together before anybody goes to prison!"

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